CARLOWRIE

by

Annie S. Swan

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W. F. CHRISTY

CARLOWRIE;

OR,

AMONG LOTHIAN FOLK.

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN,

AUTHOR OF 'ALDERSYDE.'

New Edition.

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CRANSTON & STOWE.

TO

THE DEAR MEMORY OF HER WHO MADE

THE SUNSHINE OF THE HOME

THAT WAS.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER PAGE
I. THE BEATOUNS OF CARLOWRIE, . . . 9
II. ELSIE, ... 26
III. THE LAIRD'S FOLK, ... 46
IV. WOFUL CHANGES, ... 63
V. THE MINISTER'S WOOING, ... 74
VI. AT TYNEHOLM, ... 86
VII. ELSIE'S FAREWELL TO LINTLAW, . . . 101
VIII. THE LADY ANNE TRAQUAIR, ... 120
IX. MY GRAND-DAUGHTER! 135
X. NEWS OF ELSIE, ... 152
XI. LEAVING THIS WORLD FOR A BETTER, . . 168
XII. SACRED HOURS, ... 178
XIII. LYNDON PRIORY, ... 193
XIV. MISS RITCHIE'S COUSIN BETSY, . . . 206
XV. BLIGHTED HOPE, ... 223
XVI. TRAQUAIR, ... 239
XVII. DEAR LINTLAW AGAIN, ... 252
XVIII. LADY ANNE'S WILL, ... 268
XIX. HOME, ... 284
XX. CLEARING AWAY THE MISTS, ... 302
CONCLUSION, ... 317

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CHAPTER I.

THE BEATOUNS OF CARLOWRIE.

SIX struck on the big old-fashioned eight-day clock in the wide lobby of the farmhouse of Carlowrie. The ploughmen and the dairymaids were at their porridge in the kitchen, and their blithe chatter broke the stillness of the house. There was no sound in the ben-end but the click of the mistress's knitting-needles and the occasional falling of the ashes from the grate. The mistress sat bolt upright in her arm-chair, which she had drawn close into the window to catch the fading light of the day now closing in. She was a woman yet in her prime, of tall, spare, angular form, with a thin, sharp, sunburnt face, keen black eyes, and a mouth which looked as if it had never learned to smile. Her hair was iron-grey, and brushed tightly back under her afternoon cap, a composition of black lace and satin ribbon, relieved by a bunch of unnatural-looking red roses in front. It was not a becoming head-dress, but Mrs. Nanny Beatoun had never (no, not even in her girlhood) studied the art of dressing. Her gown was wincey, of a sober, serviceable grey colour, and the long, wide, gathered skirt was somewhat relieved by three rows of black braid, sewed in straight lines round it. It was further relieved by a big lilac cotton apron tied round the waist by a linen tape, which served to hold the sheath for the knitting-needles. Mrs. Beatoun knitted, as she did everything, with rapidity and skill. It was her boast that she could foot a sock in an evening after the lamp was set.

The furnishings of the ben-end at Carlowrie were plain but substantial. There was a sideboard behind the door, which had stood there since Saunders Beatoun's grandfather brought the first mistress home to Carlowrie. There was not a scratch nor a stain to mar its brilliant polish, and it certainly was a handsome and even elegant-looking piece of furniture in spite of its spindle legs.

The other articles in the room were in keeping with the sideboard; but the bare floor, though as clean as soap and scrubbing-brush could make it, gave the room a cheerless aspect, reminding one of a perpetual cleaning day. Mrs. Beatoun was very wroth at carpets and all other species of floor covering, holding them to be useless luxuries, as well as harbours of dirt of every kind.

At the last stroke of six the mistress rose, and, crossing the passage, pushed open the kitchen door. At sight of her the ploughmen rose with one accord, and slunk out by the back door. It was one of Mrs. Beatoun's rigid laws that the men should only come in to their meals and retire whenever they had eaten the portion set before them. Woe betide them if they lingered even a moment daffing with the girls. She did not spare them with her tongue.

'Get the plates washed up an' mak' ready for the byre, Peggie Alison,' she said severely. 'An' you, Jean Gillespie, gang yont the road an' see if the gig binna in sicht. Guid save us, ye donnert craters, d'ye no' see the tea bilin' like kail in the pat?'

So saying, Mrs. Beatoun darted towards the fireplace, and whisked the brown teapot back from the blazing log.

The girls grimaced to each other behind her back, but outwardly preserved a decorous and respectful demeanour, and proceeded to obey orders at once.

Mrs. Beatoun's will dared not be disputed; she ruled with a rod of iron both within and without at Carlowrie. Having set the maids about their work, she retired to the ben-end again, and began to set the table for tea. Four o'clock was the usual tea hour at Carlowrie; it was only delayed to-day on account of the absence of the master at Ormiston, seeing his brother the doctor, who was seriously ill. By the time the mistress had got the tea ready the rumble of wheels in the farmyard proclaimed the arrival of the gig. A few minutes later the farmer entered the house and came straight into the ben-end, for once disregarding his wife's injunction to wipe his shoes on the mat.

In personal appearance Saunders Beatoun was the very antipode of his wife. He was a short, burly man, with a broad, red, honest face, the expression of which was kindliness itself. He was of a gentle, unobtrusive, easy-going nature, and always preferred to give in to his wife rather than have any words with her. Anything approaching to 'flytin'' was Saunders Beatoun's special abhorrence.

They said he was henpecked, but if it was true, the process did not put him at all about. It was a common saying with him, and he generally followed it with a huge laugh, that he had proved the grey mare to be the better horse, for Nanny had made Carlowrie pay as it had never paid before since the name of Beatoun had been inscribed upon its lease.

'Ye're by your time, Saunders,' was his wife's greeting. 'Hoo did you find Jeems Beatoun the day?'

'Jeems Beatoun's deid, Nanny,' replied Saunders, and went away out to the passage to hang up his whip and coat and hat. It seemed to his wife that he took a longer time than usual to do these things.

'Dear me, that's unco sudden, surely,' she said at length. 'Come awa' to yer tea, an' let's hear about his end.'

Saunders slowly came into the room, and

took his accustomed seat at the side of the table. His voice sounded unsteady in the grace, and he seemed to get out the usual phrases with difficulty. Then he began to his tea without seeming inclined to give his wife any particulars concerning the death of their kinsman.

'What hae I dune that I shouldna be telt what mainner o' end yer brither had?' she said at length, with an ominous toss of her head.

'Naething, Nanny,' said Saunders absently. 'Jeems Beatoun deed as he lived, in the fear o' God; stannin' by yon bedside, I couldna help prayin' that my last end micht be like his.'

Mrs. Beatoun kept silent. She had never liked James Beatoun, but there was something in her husband's tone and words which made her somewhat ashamed of that causeless dislike.

'An' the bairn?' she queried at length.

A tear stole unawares to the corner of Saunders Beatoun's honest eye, but he hastily brushed it away, as if ashamed that he should be so weak.

'Puir wee orphan lammie,' he said tenderly;

'I'm wae for Jeems Beatoun's ae bairn this day, Nanny, an' what's to become o' her the Lord only kens.'

'Has her faither left naething, nae provision for her?'

Saunders shook his head. 'The practice has dwindled awa' ever sin' he lost his health an' that Embro man cam' gaspin' for a deid man's shoon. I question if there'll be eneuch left to pay the debts an' the funeral expenses.'

Very grim grew the face of the mistress. She had no quarter for those who could not pay their way and lay by a little for a rainy day.

'Eh, but that's like a Beatoun! never a thocht for the morn i' their heids. An' it hadna been for me, Saunders, ye wad hae been ooten Carlowrie long ago.'

'Ay, woman, maybe,' said Saunders, speaking at random, for his thoughts had travelled again to the bereaved and desolate house he had so lately left.

'It's a pity it's a lass bairn,' said Mrs. Beatoun at length. 'Laddies can fecht their way better. Some o' her mither's folk'll hae to be socht oot. It's them that'll hae to look efter her.'

'They shut their doors an' hearts for ever on the puir young thing because she stuck to the honest lad she lo'ed,' said Saunders Beatoun, with darkening brow. 'They shall never be asked to provide for Jeems Beatoun's bairn.'

'Then wha's to dae it, Saunders Beatoun?' queried his wife somewhat sourly.

Saunders sat a moment in silence, then, drawing his snuff-box from his pocket, took a substantial pinch, as if to nerve himself for a coming ordeal.

'The bairn'll hae to come to Carlowrie, Nanny,' he said slowly, but with considerable firmness.

Mrs. Beatoun never spoke, which was in itself an ominous sign, for in general her tongue, as the neighbours said, 'waggit at baith ends.'

She rose presently, and began with a great clatter to gather up the tea-things. When they were all carried to the kitchen, she set the lamp, and, drawing in her chair, resumed her knitting. Saunders regarded her for a few minutes in perturbed silence, then ventured a remark.

'Hae ye naething to say, Nanny?' he inquired rather meekly.

'Naething. It's a' settled, it seems; onything I could say wad mak' nae alteration in your plan, I fancy,' she replied slowly.

'Hae ye ony reasonable objection what way the puir orphan shouldna come hame to Carlowrie?' said Saunders. 'We hae nae bairns, an' we hae plenty to spare for man an' beast. What a wee white-faced lassie bairn 'll need will never be missed.'

'It's no' that, Saunders Beatoun,' said Mrs. Beatoun sharply. 'It's the upsettin' o' the ways o' the hoose. I've never been used to bairns, an' dinna ken what to dae wi' them. Besides, James Beatoun, a man o' middle age, oucht to hae haen something to leave his ae bairn. Him an' his wife aye cairret their heids unco high; see noo what's come o' a' their upsettin'.'

Saunders made no reply. He could very well have resented these imputations upon the memory of his brother and the gentle wife, for whom he had ever entertained a species of wondering reverence. But at the present stage of affairs, it behoved him to hold his tongue for peace's sake, as he had had to do systematically since the day he had brought Nanny Dalrymple of Windyweary home to Carlowrie.

'It's a wunner to me ye didna bring her hame wi' ye the nicht, Saunders,' said she presently, with a grim smile.

'I was very near daein't,' Saunders admitted. 'Nanny, woman, dinna be sae thrawn. If it was a niece o' yours, ye ken brawly hoo welcome I wad mak' her to Carlowrie.'

'Nane o' my folk need charity, thank the Lord,' snapped Nanny; though in spite of herself, her heart was softening. She was not bad-hearted at the bottom, but she was one of those referred to in the Proverbs of Solomon as contentious; and Saunders Beatoun had had his own to bear with her.

Just then, greatly to the relief of Saunders, and perhaps to his wife's relief also, the door opened, and a young girl entered the room. She was attired in walking garb,—a neat brown merino dress, a white hat, with trimmings of brown ribbon, and a red shawl wound about her shoulders. She was not more than sixteen, but was womanly in appearance, as the eldest daughter of a household often is before she is out of her teens. She was not pretty, but her face, with its healthy sunburnt hue, and clear bright hazel eyes, was a comely one to look at. Her figure was still unformed, but gave promise of dignity and womanly grace. She was neat and smart, down to the very shoe-latch tied so daintily above the immaculate white stocking. She carried a basket over her arm, which she set down on the table with a sigh and a smile.

'Dear me, that *is* a brae from Crichtoun up to Carlowrie,' she said. 'How are you to-night, Aunt Nanny, and you, Uncle Saunders?'

'Verra weel, Christian Dalrymple,' said Mrs. Beatoun rather ungraciously. 'Hoo's a' wi' ye at Lintlaw, an' whaur hae ye been trailin' to the nicht?'

'We're a' weel, thank you, auntie,' replied Christian. 'Am I no' to sit down the night?' she added, with a little humorous smile. 'I've been at the Manse. Mother sent me ower wi' some butter and eggs. The minister's hame, Uncle Saunders.'

'Ay, an' what like a chiel' is he when ye get a better look at him?' asked Saunders.

'Very nice; but oh, Aunt Nanny, he is sae young. It will seem funny to see him in the pulpit after poor old Doctor Rogers.'

'If he hae the grace o' God, his youth'll no be agin him, lassie,' said Aunt Nanny. 'Sit down, Christian, and gie's yer crack. It's broad munelicht, isn't?'

'Ay, it's a braw nicht; but I canna bide lang, for we milk at eight, an' mother has not been so well to-day.'

'Hoots, what's twa kye?—naething ava'. Hoo's a' the laddies?'

'Fine; Davie's rinnin' on his ain feet sin' ye were ower at Lintlaw. What a dear wee bairn he is,' said Christian; and the smile which accompanied the words made her face almost beautiful.

'Oh, Uncle Saunders, mother minded me to be sure and ask for the doctor. Is he keepin' better?'

'He's gane, my woman,' said Uncle

Saunders briefly; and Auntie Nanny knitted away more rapidly than ever, and for a little there was nothing said.

'I am very sorry, Uncle Saunders. Father and mother will be sorry too,' said Christian at length, with simple but earnest sympathy. Yet still there was nothing said.

'Wha's come to keep the minister's hoose?' queried Mrs. Beatoun suddenly.

'A housekeeper, auntie,—an auldish woman,' replied Christian, much surprised at the sudden change in the conversation. 'Mr. Laidlaw told me he had no relations but one sister, married to the minister of the West Church in Dalkeith. His father was minister there, uncle,' she added, addressing the latter part of her remarks to her uncle, whose silent and downcast appearance rather distressed her. 'Well, I'll need to run, auntie. When are you and uncle comin' ower to Lintlaw? I was to be sure and ask.'

'Maybe on Sunday nicht, tell yer faither,' said Saunders. Then Aunt Nanny rose to escort her niece out to the front door.

'Tell yer mither I'll maybe be ower the morn,' she said, lingering with her a moment on the moonlit doorstep. 'There's likely to be changes sune in Carlowrie, Christian Dalrymple.'

'What kind of changes, Aunt Nanny?' asked the girl in surprise.

'Jeems Beatoun's left a bairn, ye ken,—a lassie,—an' naething'll serve yer uncle but that she'll come here.'

'That will be very nice for you, Aunt Nanny,' said Christian innocently. 'Poor wee girl, how lonely and sad she must be!'

'I dinna ken that it'll be very nice for me, Kirsten,' said Aunt Nanny. 'It'll mak' an unco change i' the hoose. Ye maun mind she's no' a lassie sic as you. She's a delicate, peevish, spoiled wee cutty, that greets at naething. She's just as like her genty mither as she could well be.'

'I never saw Doctor Beatoun's wife, but I've heard mither say what a sweet woman she was,' said Christian. 'If she's delicate, she'll get strong at Carlowrie. Ye'll bring her ower to Lintlaw, Aunt Nanny?'

'I'll see. Guid-nicht, Kirsten. My respects to yer faither an' mither,' said Aunt Nanny abruptly; and, closing the door without further ceremony, returned to the parlour, and took up her knitting again.

'If it had been a lassie like Kirsten, noo, I wadna hae cared, Saunders,' she said at length. 'She wad be o' use to a body.'

'Folk's just as God made them, Nanny,' said Saunders. 'Woman, could ye no' say ae guid word o' the Beatouns, just for a change?'

Mrs. Beatoun pursed up her lips, but preserved a dignified silence.

'Are ye gaun to send onything ower to the Manse?' inquired the farmer, changing the theme once more.

'What kind o' thing?'

'A ham, or a kebbuck o' cheese, or something; see, Kirsten's been ower wi' an offerin' o' guidwill frae Dauvit and Effie. It's the least we can dae.'

'Effie Dalrymple wad tak' the bite oot o' her ain mouth to gie to the frem, an' she never gets ony thanks for it,' said his wife grimly. 'No, I'm no' gaun to send onything to the Manse. Were the new minister a man wi' a family it wad be anither thing. There's nae use learnin' a young man an ill lesson. Besides, when we're gaun to get anither mooth to feed, we'll need to be mair carefu' than ever.'

Again Saunders Beatoun was silenced, this time so effectually that he never ventured another remark.

Whether intentionally or not, at the reading that night he chose that portion of Scripture which specially enjoins upon wives the duty of obedience. Also, his prayer was to the point: 'O Lord God, aince mair we puir, thowless, sinfu' craters mak' bauld to come afore the footstool o' Thy grace, to uplift oor hearts to Thee for a' the guidness an' mercy extended towards us this day, an' a' the days o' oor earthly pilgrimage gane by. We would praise Thee, O Lord God, for a guid ingatherin' o' the precious fruits o' the earth, for a fu' stackyaird, an' plenty for man an' beast. Mak' us gratefu', an' dinna let us withhaud our haund frae daein' guid. There's nane o'd oors, Lord God, Thou hast but lent it to us, therefore constrain us to use it aright. We would thank Thee, O Lord, for the dispensation o' Thy providence which Thou hast called upon us to bear this day. Lord, we praise Thee for Jeems Beatoun's life an' death. May it be a solemn lesson to us, an' when oor time comes, may we be as ready. Lord, if it be Thy holy wull, gar Nanny gie ower her yaummerin' about Jeems Beatoun's bairn. Open her ear an' heart to the cry o' the orphan. An' if it be na Thy wull, then be pleased to grant Thy unworthy servant, noo humbled afore Thee, grace to bear wi' the weaker vessel. While at this time no' forgettin' the Queen an' the Prince Consort, an' a' wi' authority under Thee an' abune us, we wadna forget to commend to Thy care the young lad Thou hast set ower us in heavenly things. Gie him muckle grace, as muckle, Lord God, as will keep him frae bein' cairret awa' wi' sinfu' pride. An' seein' he's like to be a burnin' and a shinin' licht in Zion, keep his flock frae thinkin' ower muckle o' him, mair, maybe, than o' the Maister, whase servant He is. Lord, we a' need Thy care. We canna stand alane. We canna dae onything wantin' Thee. Hasten Thy kingdom, an' abolish the black an' darksome kingdom o' Satan. An' a' for Thy Son's sake. Amen.'

Nanny was effectually silenced now, and there was never another word said against the homecoming of Doctor Beatoun's bairn to Carlowrie.

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE.

'WHAT'S to be done with all the furniture, Uncle Saunders, and father's books, and mother's things?'

It was a pathetic question, a pathetic scene altogether, that chill, wet October afternoon in the desolate house of Doctor Beatoun at Ormiston.

Saunders Beatoun was standing in the middle of the dining-room floor, with his wet greatcoat buttoned up to his chin, and it was a question whether these were tears or raindrops on his ruddy cheeks. The small person who asked the question was the child who had now no home on earth, except the one to which she was going to-day, and where she was only half welcome after all.

She was a little, slender, fairy-looking thing, in her thirteenth year, though she looked younger. She was very pretty, with a kind of refined, even patrician, beauty not common in the middle class of life. Her complexion was exceedingly fair, her eyes dark, and her hair golden, and clustering all round her proud little head in a tangle of ringlets. She wore deep mourning, made very plain, of course; yet even in childhood little Elsie Beatoun invested everything she wore with a nameless grace and becomingness. It was her heritage from her frail mother, in whose veins had flowed the blood of one of the best Scottish families.

'They'll be lookit efter, Elsie,' said Uncle Saunders, not caring to tell that the furniture and the books would need to be sold immediately, to pay what the deceased doctor owed in Ormiston and Tranent. 'An' I've telt Lisbeth to gather thegither your mother's things an' pack them in a box, an' I'll send a cairt for them. Weel, are ye ready, bairn? it's nigh four o'clock, an' the darkenin'll fa' quick the nicht.'

'Very well, Uncle Saunders, thank you,' said Elsie quietly; 'yes, I'm ready. I've only to say good-bye to Lisbeth.'

So saying, she walked away demurely to the kitchen to bid good-bye to the faithful soul who had taken charge of the motherless household since the death of the gentle wife when Elsie was nine years old.

In the meantime, Saunders Beatoun went out to the gig, and took the waterproof apron off the cushions, and tried to make the seat as comfortable as he could for his little niece. Presently she came walking out to the door with her cloak rolled round her, perfectly calm and self-possessed, only she was deadly pale, and the big pathetic eyes had a shadow lying in their deepest depths. Uncle Saunders tenderly lifted her into the high gig, and, tucking her in, jumped up beside her, and gave Jess a gentle touch with the whip, setting her off in an easy trot. When they drove down the wide picturesque street, past the quaint old cross, and were about to turn off into the road to Ford, Elsie turned and looked back at the old grey house at the head of the town, one long pathetic look, then sat very still, close in at her uncle's side, with her head down to keep the bitter rain from driving against her face.

'Elsie!'

'Yes, Uncle Saunders.'

'Are ye cauld, my dawtie?'

'No, Uncle Saunders, but—but'—

'What, my lamb?' said Uncle Saunders softly, bending towards the poor little mite cowering at his side.

'I was just thinking how the rain would beat down the poor wee gowans on father's and mother's grave. I was up at the churchyard this morning before you came, and they were so bonnie and fresh. I was glad. Mother liked the gowans, Uncle Saunders; she used to watch for them in the spring.'

'Ay, ay, my lamb,' said Uncle Saunders, wiping away a tear with his wet coat sleeve. Somehow, the quiet self-possession and composed talk of his brother's little girl troubled him. It was unlike a child. From his own experience he had no knowledge of the ways of children, only he knew that the bairns at Lintlaw cried, and lustily too, for every childish grief. Go into that stirring household when he liked, one or other was sure to be greeting about something.

'Yer heart's sair, Elsie; could ye no' greet, my dearie?' he said, with a tenderness most touching to see in one like him.

'Oh no, Uncle Saunders. I was father's little woman, and I must not cry. I was to be brave, he said that day he died,' replied Elsie gravely, and for a long time there was nothing more said. In a little while they passed the long, sloping village of Pathhead, and thence down into the glen at Ford, the rain still falling desolately from weeping skies. A gale during the previous night had whirled a great number of the leaves from the trees, and they lay thickly on the roads, where they were beaten and soiled among the mud.

Uncle Saunders urged Jess forward, for it was getting dark already, and the wind was bitterly cold.

'What a long way it is to your house, Uncle Saunders,' said Elsie, as Jess was walking slowly up a steep hill, lined on either side by spreading beeches. 'Is that it over there?' she added, pointing to a big square house two or three fields distant, facing the road.

'No, Elsie, that's Lintlaw. There's plenty wee anes there for ye to play wi'. Ye'll see them the morn at the kirk. There's Hew, the auldest, a fine strappin' lad, no' his equal i' the Lothians; then there's Kirsten, a douce, kindly lass ye'll like brawly; then there's Sandy, wee Dod, an Robbie, an' Effie, an' syne wee Davie, the flooer o' the flock. Ay, it's a blithe, cheery biggin' Lintlaw,' he added, with a sigh, for it was a great sorrow and disappointment to honest, big-hearted Saunders Beatoun that no bairnies had ever come to make gladness in Carlowrie.

'See, Elsie, there's Carlowrie noo, an' there's yer auntie lookin' oot at the door.'

Elsie eagerly raised her head and peered through the gathering darkness and the blinding rain, to see her future home. It was a low-lying house, snugly sheltered by the compact steading and the well-filled stackyard; that was all Elsie could discern in her first glance. Presently Jess stood still, as was her wont, at the drinking-trough in the 'yaird;' then Aunt Nanny came stepping gingerly across the sloppy back doors to the gig.

'Ye're unco late, Saunders. I was beginnin' to be feared,' she said. 'An' this is Elsie. Bairn, ye'll be half-deid.'

So saying, she lifted Elsie from the gig, and carried her in by the back door, through the kitchen, and into the ben-end, where she set her down on the rug and looked her all over. The child met her scrutiny with an answering look, then very slowly turned away. That look told the child that it would be to her uncle she must turn for comfort at Carlowrie.

'Ye're very like yer mither, bairn,' was Aunt Nanny's verdict, for there was nothing of the Beatouns about her but the big dark eyes.

'Yes, Aunt Nanny. Will Uncle Saunders soon be in?' said the child. 'Will I go up-stairs and take off my things?'

Somewhat discomfited by the calm and self-possessed demeanour of the child, from whom she had expected to see something different, Aunt Nanny silently assented, and led the way along the wide stone passage to a little room which of yore had been a store-closet, but which, in anticipation of the new addition to her household, and in order to save the best bedroom, Mrs. Beatoun had caused to be converted into a sleeping apartment for Elsie. It was very small, and had no fireplace, but it was clean and comfortable enough, and had a cheery little window which looked out into the farmyard. There Elsie was left, with many instructions as to folding her clothes neatly into the drawers, and as to keeping them tidy after they were there. Tea was ready in a little while, but Elsie ate very sparingly; it did not seem as if her appetite would make large inroads upon the larder at Carlowrie.

A quiet and rather dreary evening was spent in the parlour, Aunt Nanny knitting as usual, and Uncle Saunders reading the newspaper, which came once a week with the carrier's cart, and was a great treat. Elsie sat on a little creepie as near to her uncle as she dared, lest Aunt Nanny should take offence, looking gravely into the fire, or stroking gently the sleek grey back of Jenny, the old cat, which was the most comfortable-looking thing in Carlowrie. Aunt Nanny forbore to ask Elsie any questions concerning her knitting or sewing abilities, but mentally resolved to provide her with worsted and wires on Monday morning. At eight o'clock precisely, Aunt Nanny laid aside her knitting, and, taking down the big Bible, read a lesson to herself, as she did every Saturday night, a kind of preparation, as it were, for the Sabbath day. Nanny Beatoun had been brought up in a very godly family, who were rigid in their attendance upon the observance of the Lord's day, the Fast day, and other solemn seasons in the Kirk. She accounted herself a devout Christian, and had no sympathy with mirth or pleasure-loving folks; indeed, she had on more than one occasion reproved her brother David at Lintlaw, for permitting what she thought unbecoming levity among his children. But in a houseful of high-spirited rollicking lads and lasses, it is not easy to keep them in continual remembrance of the solemnity of the Sabbath and other grave occasions. And Lintlaw was not slow to tell his sister that, and to add that she knew nothing about bairns, nor what a difference they made in a house. Many prejudices melt away under the sunshine of a baby's smile.

Elsie Beatoun was much awed by the solemnity of the reading at Carlowrie. Uncle Saunders read two long chapters, and then they all knelt down, and he began to pray. Elsie tried hard to follow him, but very soon lost the thread of what he was saying. There were times when Saunders Beatoun forgot himself, and was carried away in praying, till even Nanny grew weary, and wished for the Amen.

When Elsie lay down in her bed that night, she wondered whether in a long time she might grow accustomed to this new, strange, solemn life, and cease to fret for those who had loved her, and whom she loved in memory still, beyond anything on earth. She slept soundly, for she was wearied out; but she awoke early, to hear the clatter of milk-pails in the dairy, and the shrill voice of her aunt setting the maids to their work. She rose at once, for the sun streaming in at her window made her think it was far on in the morning.

She went first to the parlour, but there was nobody there, though the cloth was laid for breakfast; so she stole into the kitchen, which was empty also. She was greatly interested to see the porridge bubbling in the big pot on the side of the grate, and wondered who could ever eat such a great quantity. After having made herself familiar with the appearance of the kitchen, she went out by the back door into the yard. The men were watering their horses at the trough, the poultry were making a great disturbance over their breakfast, which Aunt Nanny had just scattered for them before proceeding to superintend operations in the byre.

What amused and delighted Elsie most of all was a big good-natured-looking sow, with her three little ones at her heels, snuffing contentedly about the yard as if quite at home. After looking her fill at the live stock, Elsie stepped daintily across the still sloppy yard, and entered the garden by a little wicket at the side. It was trim and tidy as could be, and there were plenty of flowers yet, sweet-william, bachelors' buttons, peppermint, southernwood; and even a few yellow pansies and sturdy carnations, which had braved the storm, grew side by side in that sweet old-fashioned confusion which modern taste does not permit. The garden sloped down from the house, then verged into the cows' park, which ran almost perpendicularly down to the Tyne. Elsie could see the little river, swollen by recent rains, rushing between its banks, which were fringed by drooping willows and graceful alders, relieved here and there by the bright clusters on the rowans, which were very plentiful in Crichtounden. On the opposite steep, surrounded by sheltering trees, which were now tinged by the sombre russet tints of the late autumn, stood the kirk and Manse; while a little to the right the solid battlements of the ancient castle of Crichtoun seemed to keep a grim and faithful watch over the peaceful vale.

Elsie was disturbed in her rapt contemplation of this picturesque scene (for the child had a keen eye for the beautiful in nature) by the shrill voice of her aunt, who had caught sight of her while crossing from the byre to the kitchen door. So she hastened to obey the summons, and was bidden wash her face out at the rain-water barrel,—so novel a place for the performance of the toilet that the child was much amused. There was no porridge eaten in the ben-end at Carlowrie on the Sabbath morning, ham and eggs and tea being provided as a substitute. When breakfast was over, Elsie was provided with a Bible, from which she was to learn the fifty-third

Psalm for repetition to her aunt in the evening. She found it difficult to fix her attention, for her eyes would wander through the window to the pleasant garden which lay so still and sweet in the fresh sunshine of the autumn day. Before she had committed even a double verse to memory, her aunt came to her, telling her it was time to get ready for the kirk.

It was the first time Elsie Beatoun had been left to dress herself on the Sabbath day. Ever since her mother's death it had been faithful Lisbeth Fairlie's duty and privilege to see that the only child of her mistress went out as befitted Doctor Beatoun's daughter, as her lady mother would have had her go. Lisbeth had an intense respect for the memory of her gentle mistress.

However, she managed to complete her toilet, down to the very tying of her bonnet strings, and, drawing on her gloves, went away to the parlour, where she was joined presently by Uncle Saunders, who wore his black broadcloth suit and a white neckerchief in token of mourning for his brother. Elsie could not help thinking that he looked better in the rough homespun tweeds he wore on week-days.

'Certy, ye are a braw little quean,' he said, looking approvingly at the trim little figure,—'a perfect wee leddy, eh, Elsie?'

Elsie smiled, but was presently awed by the apparition of her aunt, attired in all the glory of her Sunday clothes. Although void of taste, Mrs. Beatoun liked showy and expensive clothes, as was seen in the richness and stiffness of her changing silk gown, with the big brocaded flower running through it, the massive trimmings of her drab cloth cloak, and the profusion of bright-coloured feathers and flowers in her towering head-gear. Her hands were decorously gloved, and she carried her Bible and handkerchief in a little black silk reticule hung over her arm by a silk cord. She looked severely and critically at her niece, made a vigorous but vain effort to smooth the refractory golden locks which would stray out below the little black bonnet, and then said they would need to go.

'I should hae had my blacks, Saunders; an' there'll be some'll say I am wantin' in respect to your brither the doctor,' she whispered as they went out by the front door. 'But Marion Brown in Newlandrigg said she couldna promise me my goon this week, an' it's no' likely I'm gaun to bide awa' frae the kirk for what folk'll say.'

'Surely no', Nanny,' assented Saunders; though, looking at his wife, he could not but think that, in contrast to his own and Elsie's sombre attire, she looked strikingly gay. It was a pleasant walk down the path through the cows' park, and across the rustic bridge which spanned the river; then over the stile and up through the dense firwood, and along the edge of the glebe to the kirkyard. Just as they came within sight of the gate, the bell began to ring, a sweet, tinkling, irregular sound, which could be heard for miles around, so still was the air of that pleasant Sabbath morning.

'Yonder's Lintlaw folks comin',' said Aunt Nanny, pointing away down to the low road winding through the glen. 'There's Aunt Effie, so she maun be better. The Dalrymples mak' a guidly turn-oot on the Sabbath, Saunders.'

'Ay; Dauvit's bringin' up his family in the fear o' God,' said Saunders; then fell a little behind to return the greetings of some neighbours.

But Aunt Nanny did not wait. Taking

Elsie's hand firmly in hers, she sailed up the broad path and into the kirk, her silk gown making a great rustling as she went down the long passage to the Carlowrie pew. Slowly the worshippers dropped by twos and threes into the kirk until every seat was filled. Elsie watched her uncle come in near the end, and behind him there came his brother-in-law, a tall, stern-looking man, followed by a sweet, motherly-looking woman, quietly and modestly dressed, in every way a complete contrast to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Beatoun of Carlowrie. Their children came behind them, in steps and stairs, as people said, the only one left at home being wee Davie, who was just able to toddle alone, and so could not yet be brought to the kirk. Elsie Beatoun looked with great curiosity at the Dalrymples, but in her little heart that quiet Sabbath morning, there was no foreshadowing of that strange web of destiny in which her life was to be so strangely intertwined with the family at Lintlaw. Just then the bell-ringing ceased, the minister's man brought up the Bible, and then showed the minister up to the pulpit. He was a young man, as Christian had said, but his appearance and manner were calculated to inspire reverence and esteem. His fine, open, manly countenance wore an expression of devoutness, and as he looked upon the faces of his flock assembled before him for the first time, he appeared to be suddenly and deeply moved. Contrary to the usual routine of service, his first words were, 'Let us pray,' and the earnest, heartfelt petition which followed filled the hearts of those who had had any misgivings with unspeakable thankfulness and joy. Even careless ones felt stirred by these eloquent, searching words, and surely the prayers of the godly people in the parish would avail, and the new minister of Crichtoun would make a great stir among the dry bones.

The whole service was impressive, and when it was over the congregation met in twos and threes about the kirkyard, discussing the merits of their new minister, and congratulating each other upon their good fortune in securing one who was so evidently a man of God. When the Beatouns got out to the kirkyard, they found Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple and their two elder children waiting for them; the younger ones, like colts let loose in a field, were off down the hill at a gallop, which greatly exercised their Aunt Nanny.

'Hoo are ye the day, Nanny?' said the sweet, pleasant voice of the mistress of Lintlaw. 'And this is Doctor Beatoun's wee lassie. Eh, but she's like, like her mither, Saunders.'

As she spoke, she laid her hand so gently on Elsie's shoulder, that the child turned to her with a rush of tears in her eyes. Seeing that, the mistress of Lintlaw bent down and kissed the fair cheek, little guessing that that simple caress bound the heart of Elsie Beatoun to her in indissoluble bonds. Then Lintlaw himself spoke a kind word to her, and Christian took her hand, while Hew, a big, strapping lad, very like his handsome father, looked at her kindly but bashfully, after the manner of lads of his age. Then the three young ones walked on in front, while their elders came behind more soberly, discussing the heads of the sermon.

'Ye'll come to Lintlaw and see us, Elsie?' said Christian, in her kind, sisterly way. 'It'll be quiet for you at Carlowrie.'

'Yes, thank you, if Aunt Nanny will let

me,' replied Elsie quietly, and a half smile of compassion touched for a moment Christian Dalrymple's lips. She was quick to understand all that Elsie's words implied.

'We have a bonnie garden at Lintlaw, an' a little pony. Hew will give you a ride when you come; won't you, Hew?'

'Yes, of course,' replied Hew, longing to say a great deal more, for his big heart seemed to fill at sight of the fair-faced, desolate wee girlie, who was so different from the rosy-cheeked healthy lassies whom he was accustomed to see in his own and other homes.

'I'd like to come. Father used to give me rides on his pony. It was called after mother and me,' she said, and her sympathetic listeners saw the gathering of the deep shadow in her big dark eyes, and were full of sorrow for her.

'Do roses like that grow in your garden?' she said, suddenly pointing to a lovely half-blown bud in Hew's button-hole. 'There are no roses in the garden where I live.'

'Oh yes, plenty of them at Lintlaw,' said Christian blithely, 'all growing up the front, and in the garden too; you'll see them and get as many as you like when you come.'

They had now reached the bridge which they must cross to reach Carlowrie, while the Dalrymples had to keep along to the road to Lintlaw. They did not stand long talking there. Mrs. Dalrymple asked Elsie kindly to come to Lintlaw, then they all bade her good-bye; and, after Hew had shaken hands with her, he took the rosebud from his coat and gave it to her, saying, awkwardly enough, she might have it if she liked, as there were plenty more at Lintlaw.

Elsie smiled up at him, and said, 'Thank you,' very simply, and so was forged the first link in the chain of destiny which was to bind these young lives so closely together in days to come.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAIRD'S FOLK.

'YOU are better to-day, my love?'

These anxious words were uttered by the lady of Tyneholm, as she bent over an invalid couch standing in the wide, low window of the drawing-room at Tyneholm. Upon the couch lay a young girl in the early bloom of womanhood, of such frail and delicate appearance that it was no marvel the heart of the fond mother was often heavy with unspoken dread.

Though mother and daughter, the resemblance between them was very slight. The elder lady was of strikingly youthful appearance still, though she had been a wife for five-and-twenty years, and a widow for ten.

'Yes, mamma, I feel strong and well to-day,' replied Edith Hamilton almost gaily. 'Didn't I always say *only* Scotch air, and above all the air of dear Tyneholm, would restore me, in spite of our wise physician's prophecies? Oh, it is glorious, glorious, to be at home!'

As she spoke her eyes wandered lovingly through the window to the richly-wooded park, where the ancestral beeches towered their stately heads, with gowans and butter-cups and blue speedwell nestling contentedly at their feet. It was a fair picture, for through a gap in the network of bright green boughs there was a lovely glimpse of the long glen of Crichtoun, with the low-lying slopes of the Moorfoots in the distance, looking almost mystic and unreal in the haze of the summer morning.

The frail daughter of the house of Hamilton had gone in quest of health to every sunny spot in Europe during the last two years, but had seen none so fair nor so dear as the home where she had spent her childhood, and which was doubly hallowed and endeared by tender memories of the father she had loved so well.

Mrs. Hamilton smiled. She was English

born, and was not passionately attached to her husband's paternal heritage.

'Edith, you will never outgrow this strange love for Tyneholm,' she said banteringly. 'Here I always feel shut out from the world.'

'That is why I love it so, mamma,' smiled Edith. 'Where has Keith gone, do you know?'

'Only to the stables, dear. Keith is bored here sometimes, I fancy. Did you want him for anything?'

'I thought, perhaps, while it is so warm and pleasant, he would drive me out a little, perhaps as far as Lintlaw; I am quite wearying to see dear Mrs. Dalrymple.'

'I will send for Keith, my dear,' replied Mrs. Hamilton, and left the room to give her order.

Then Edith turned her eyes once more to the blue sky peeping through the network of leaves, and gave herself up to a happy dream of restored health and strength, which would enable her to enjoy her youth and all the advantages of her rank. Hitherto Edith Hamilton had been little in society, for her poor health demanded quiet and retirement.

She had been the unwilling means of debarring her mother from the same privileges, for Mrs. Hamilton, though disposed to gaiety, was a devoted mother, and it could never be said of her that she left her invalid daughter to the care of strangers. She loved Edith tenderly and truly, but not with that strange passionate, yearning affection which she lavished upon her one son, the heir, nay, now the Laird of Tyneholm. Edith was her father's living image; but there was little of the Hamiltons about Keith. He was liker the dark, black-browed Northumbrian family to which his mother belonged, and in his veins coursed all the wild, passionate blood of the Cecils.

He came noisily into the house by and by, up the wide staircase two steps at a time, and bursting into the room in a fashion which sent the hot blood tingling to his sister's pale cheek. Void of nerves himself, Keith Hamilton forgot to be considerate for those of others. He was undeniably handsome. The fine figure just setting into splendid manhood, the noble head, with its cluster of waving brown hair, the dark, perfectly-featured face and keen black eye, with its subtle, winning gleam, of these any mother might be justly proud.

'Well, Edith, here I am. What can your humble servant do for you?' he asked boisterously, yet with real kindness. Keith Hamilton loved his frail, fair sister with a most passionate devotion.

'Thank you, Keith. If I get ready, will you drive me out round by Lintlaw, and home by Carlowrie and Turniedykes?'

'Oh, are you going to make a general tour of the tenantry to assure them you are still in the flesh, eh?' he asked teasingly.

'Don't tease, Keith. Be a good boy, and take *my* ponies, and promise to drive steadily,' she pleaded.

'Oh yes, with these high-stepping quadrupeds we will crawl along the roads at a pace which even *you* will be reassured. Do let me take Highflyer, and spin you through the air in the dogcart. I believe it would make you well.'

'Or kill me, which?' she said laughingly. 'No, no, Keith, I am not equal to Highflyer to-day. This is a duty you must perform, and the more unpleasant it is the more faithfully you must perform it,' an argument which set Keith off laughing unbelievingly to the stables.

In something less than an hour the good people of Newlandrigg were greatly exercised at sight of the equipage from Tyneholm rolling swiftly through the village, and to see that it held the Laird and Miss Edith herself, who they had never thought would return alive to Tyneholm. You may be sure their progress was watched; and it was duly reported that the ponies, as if of their own accord, had turned up the road to Lintlaw. Mr. Dalrymple's fields were looking their best. It was the last week of July now, and there was a lovely yellow tinge on the standing corn, which told that the harvest was drawing nigh. The green hedgerows were trim and well kept, and all the fences in good repair, for Mr. Dalrymple could never endure any untidiness, and far and near Lintlaw was known as the model farm. Up near the steading they met the farmer himself, scythe in hand, away down to cut some of the long grass from the hedgeside. Gravely he lifted his hat, and came forward to greet his Laird and his sister. The best of relations had ever existed between the

Hamiltons and their tenants; but as yet it was hardly known whether Keith Hamilton would follow in the footsteps of his forbears, as he had but newly attained his majority.

'How are you, Mr. Keith? Miss Hamilton, it's a sicht for sair een to see you back to Tyneholm, an' lookin' sae weel,' he said in his blunt way. 'We heard yestreen ye had comed hame. Certy, the mistress 'll be a prood woman the day.'

'Is she at home, Mr. Dalrymple, and quite well? and Hew, and Christian, and all the rest?' asked Miss Hamilton.

'A' at hame an' a' weel, thank the Lord,' said Lintlaw. 'Davie can haud his ain wi' the lave noo, an' he was but a bairn in airms when ye were last at Lintlaw.'

'Dear me, is it so long? Well, good-morning, Mr. Dalrymple, we will drive on,' she said, nodding pleasantly.

'Won't you come up and look round with me while my sister is gossiping with your goodwife, Mr. Dalrymple?' asked Keith; and the farmer, nothing loth, turned and walked slowly beside the ponies while they leisurely ascended the slope to the farm.

Miss Hamilton got out presently and made her way on foot through the narrow strip of wood to the front of the house. She paused a moment, and looked over the low wall into the pleasant sheltered garden, which was a perfect sight to see. Gooseberry and currant bushes were bending low with their rich harvest of fruit, and the apple trees were laden too. There were plenty of roses, as Christian had said, and the old-fashioned round plot, with the apple tree in the centre, was a perfect bloom of pink and white and deep carnation, which filled the air with a delicious perfume. Miss Hamilton smiled to see the familiar place looking so beautiful in all the wealth of the summer-time, and, as if loth to leave that picture behind, walked but slowly towards the house.

The forenoon was always busy at Lintlaw, for the early dinner permitted of no waste of time. When she turned the corner she espied upon the daisied turf a little golden-haired maiden busy making a chain of gowans, to the no small delight of a chubby little urchin, whom she at once recognised as Davie, who had been a plump, round-eyed baby the last time she had been at Lintlaw. But she was puzzled to know who his companion could be, —not Effie, at any rate, for she had a wild tangle of black locks, and eyes as blue as the forget-me-nots.

'Is Mrs. Dalrymple at home, my dear?' she asked, and at the sound of the sweet voice the small maiden sprang to her feet; she had not heard that light footfall on the velvet turf.

'Yes, ma'am, she is in. Will I tell her?' she asked, recovering her self-possession very speedily, and speaking with a grace and purity of accent which somewhat surprised Edith Hamilton.

'If you please, dear; but first tell me who you are, and is this Davie?'

'Yes, this is Davie,' said the little maiden, with a fond, proud look at the urchin, who hung shyly back, not recognising the lady who had so often held him in her arms. 'I am Elsie Beatoun; if you will come into the parlour, please, I will tell Aunt Effie you are here.'

But at that moment the front door opened, and Aunt Effie herself appeared, wiping her floury hands on her apron, which she had not paused to throw off; her sweet face aglow with pleasure and surprise. With warm words of greeting, she took the Laird's daughter into the parlour, and bade her sit down, then called to Christian to come and see Miss Hamilton.

'I never saw ye look better, Miss Edith. Please the Lord, ye'll grow strong and weel yet, and be spared mony a year to Tyneholm,' she said in her dear motherly way. 'Is Mrs. Hamilton weel, an' the Laird?'

'Thank you, yes; Keith is here with me to-day. I left him outside with Mr. Dalrymple,' replied Miss Hamilton. 'There is no difference upon you, dear Mrs. Dalrymple. Will you ever grow any older looking?'

The mistress laughed.

'A blithe heart keeps the face young, they say. But come, tell me where ye hae been sae lang. It's weary wark when Tyneholm's shut up, Miss Edith.'

'Rather ask where we have not been, Mrs. Dalrymple,—France, Italy, Spain, every country in Europe, I think; but I have never seen a land like bonnie Scotland, nor a place like dear Tyneholm.'

The smile lingered on the sweet face of the mistress, but her eyes grew dim for a moment.

'Ye are your father's daughter, Miss Edith. Just like that he used to speak o' Tyneholm. Weel, are ye gaun to bide a wee noo?'

'I don't know; mamma is so restless, you know, and she has had to live so quietly on my account for so long. By the end of August I expect we will be off to Alnwick Hall; but she has promised to bring me back to Tyneholm for Christmas. There is nothing in the world I would like so much as to settle down at Tyneholm, to live all my life among our own people.'

'That may be some day, Miss Edith; the Lord kens what is best for us,' said Mrs. Dalrymple gently. Then Christian came in, and the talk turned for a little upon the family at Lintlaw.

'They are all at school, I suppose; but who is the little girl I saw outside with Davie?' asked Miss Hamilton.

'That's Elsie Beatoun. Ye've heard o' Doctor Beatoun o' Ormiston, Saunders Beatoun's only brither, Miss Hamilton?'

'I saw him once. He had to come when I took very ill three years ago at Tyneholm, before Doctor Abercromby could be sent for to Edinburgh. I remember him,—a gentlemanly, quiet man. I thought he did me good.'

'He's awa' hame noo, Miss Hamilton, an' that's his orphan bairn,' said the mistress, with moistening eyes.

Miss Hamilton rose and looked with interest out of the window at the little maiden, still busy with her daisy chains on the green.

'She looks delicate, and is wonderfully pretty. Does she live with you?'

'Oh no; her hame is at Carlowrie. Mr. and Mrs. Beatoun are away at the fair at Dalkeith the day; that's hoo she comes to be here.'

'At Carlowrie!' repeated Miss Hamilton, with a slight smile. 'I fancy the little girl would be happier with you.'

'She never complains. Nanny's bark's waur than her bite, Miss Hamilton, an' Saunders is just bound up in the bairn. It wad gar ye smile to see them thegither.'

'We were going to Carlowrie this morning too, but will not mind when Mr. and Mrs. Beatoun are away. Oh, I hear the ponies coming round. Come away out and speak to Keith, Mrs. Dalrymple. He is a better boy than he used to be; I even think sometimes when he is old he may be like papa, only he has not papa's love for Tyneholm.'

'Certy, but he's a braw young man; there's no' his equal in the Lothians, I'm sure,' whispered the mistress, as they stepped out of doors and she saw the Laird in conversation with her husband along at the garden gate.

He lifted his cap at sight of Mrs. Dalrymple, and came forward to speak in that free, frank, winning way which made him so great a favourite with gentle and simple. Elsie sat still making her daisy chains, too much absorbed in her pleasant task to take any heed of the strangers with her uncle and aunt, and too well-bred to look even though she had felt inclined. But when the phaeton was drawing away she looked up, and Keith Hamilton saw her face.

'Why, Edith, what a lovely child! Who is that? not one of the Dalrymples, surely?' he exclaimed.

'No, she is an orphan. Her father was Doctor Beatoun of Ormiston. I must take her down to Tyneholm some day to let mamma see her. She had a great liking for Doctor Beatoun,' answered Miss Hamilton, and the subject was dismissed.

Through the sunny hours of that long summer's day, Elsie played out of doors with Davie, who almost worshipped her, because she made such a work with him, and never tired of running races, or building houses, or making gowan and buttercup wreaths for him. Elsie Beatoun was thoroughly at home at Lintlaw, and they all loved her; even wild, passionate, hot-tempered little Effie would be good and quiet with her, there was such a charm in her smile and in her gentle voice. But to Aunt Effie first, and then to Hew, Elsie clung with the greatest devotion. Her love for the sweet mother partook in it something of worship; she would follow her about, looking at her, or even sometimes touching the folds of her dress, in a way which made the mistress smile often, though the tear was never far distant. Elsie looked up to Hew just as she would have done to a big, kindly elder brother, who would do anything and everything she required of him. Whenever Elsie came to Lintlaw, Mr. Dalrymple would laugh, and say there would be no work got out of Hew that day, for there were races to be run, and funny corners to be hunted for in the woods, and rides on the pony, and a dozen other things which made the time pass swiftly and pleasantly away.

Mr. and Mrs. Beatoun had promised to drive round by Lintlaw for Elsie on their way home, and Christian put down two extra cups on the table at five o'clock, in expectation that her uncle and aunt would drop in to tea.

But the hour passed, and they were obliged to take tea at last, wondering much what kept them so long at the fair.

'When did they say they would be home, Elsie?' asked the mistress when it rang six.

'In the afternoon, Aunt Effie,' said the child. 'Uncle Saunders took the new horse in the gig, and Aunt Nanny wanted him to take it out again. The new horse kicks and runs ever so fast, just as Prince Charlie did with Hew down the road this morning.'

Mrs. Dalrymple looked rather anxious, and went away out in search of her husband, to tell what Elsie had said.

'Bless me! Saunders micht hae haen mair sense than tak' that kittle beast awa' to Dalkeith on a fair day,' he said rather testily. 'There's nae sayin' what's happen't them. We canna dae naething but jist wait an' see.'

'They were to be hirin' baith for the bothy an' the hoose, but that wadna hae keepit them sae lang. The Lord grant they may be safe, Davie.'

Another hour passed, and the anxiety increased at Lintlaw. Finally Aunt Effie despatched Robbie over to Carlowrie to see whether there was any word of them coming home.

Before he was half through the fields, however, he met one of his Aunt Nanny's maids, flushed and breathless, running to tell the news at Lintlaw. Just outside of Dalkeith, the new horse, a young thing, newly broken, and as skittish as the wind, had run off, and finally overturned the gig not far from Gallowsha' Toll. And that was not all. The mistress of Carlowrie was killed, and Saunders Beatoun lying in the Harrow Inn at Dalkeith, his life just trembling in the balance. Half-an-hour later, the Lintlaw gig, with Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple in it, drove away in the utmost haste to Dalkeith.

CHAPTER IV.

WOFUL CHANGES.

AT midnight Mr. Dalrymple returned alone to Lintlaw, having left his wife to minister by Saunders Beatoun's bedside at the Harrow Inn, as the physician absolutely forbade that the injured man should be moved. Hew, Christian, and Elsie were sitting up at the kitchen fireside, the girls white-faced and anxious, for this was a strange and terrible thing which had happened.

'Oh, father! is it true that Aunt Nanny's killed?' was Christian's trembling question.

'Ower true, Christian,' replied Lintlaw, in that brief, stern way common to him in moments of deep feeling. 'I hae left yer mither to nurse Uncle Saunders. And now get to bed, bairns, it's efter twal', and ye'll hae to be up betimes the morn, Christian.'

'Is Uncle Saunders very sore hurt, Uncle Davie?' asked Elsie, rising with the others, but lingering behind as if not satisfied with what she had heard.

'Ay, bairn, his life's hangin' by a threid, but the Lord can spare if He will. Let us pray.'

So before they went to bed, they all knelt down, and Lintlaw prayed briefly, but earnestly, in words which all felt and understood. Christian was weeping when they rose, and Hew's eyes were not dry; they wondered to see Elsie calm; the big dark eyes were dry and wide open, but they seemed darker in hue, and there was a curious contraction about the mouth which told its own tale.

'Christian,' she said, after they were in bed, 'Uncle Saunders won't get better. People you love always die. See how father and mother died. It's no use praying.'

'Wheesht, Elsie!' said Christian, rather shocked. 'If it is God's will Uncle Saunders winna dee. If guid nursing will dae ony guid, mother'll mak' him well. Oh, Elsie, how strange it is to lie down and mother not in the house! She has never been away before.'

'What would you do if you had no mother like me, if Aunt Effie were to die, Christian?' asked Elsie quietly.

'I dinna ken. God'll never take away mother, Elsie. What would father and a' the laddies dae, no' to speak o' Effie an' me?'

'God never asked what I would do without father and mother, Christian; He just took them,' replied Elsie. 'But mother was thin and pale, and always ill, not like Aunt Effie, who will live to be an old woman, I am quite sure.'

By and by, when Elsie was just falling asleep, Christian turned and spoke again.

'Elsie, I wush ye hadna spoken aboot mother as ye did. I canna get it oot o' my heid. It wad be awfu' if we were aye oor lane at Lintlaw. We couldna live without mother.'

'Don't be thinking about it, Christian,' said Elsie drowsily; 'of course Aunt Effie will live to be old, old, I *know* she will.'

Nevertheless it was several days before the haunting fear planted by that conversation faded out of Christian Dalrymple's mind.

Shortly after breakfast on the following morning Elsie was missing from Lintlaw, but they did not trouble about her, thinking she had gone over to Carlowrie to see how things were going on. In the afternoon, however, Mr. Ritchie of Scotstoun, calling to condole with his neighbour about the calamity of yesterday, mentioned that, driving home from Dalkeith, he had met Elsie Beatoun just outside Eskbank Toll, and that she had asked him the way to the Harrow Inn, saying she had walked all the way, and was going to see her Uncle Saunders. And from that day Saunders Beatoun had two nurses, and it was a question whether the old or the young was the more gentle, and watchful, and efficient. During that trying time Elsie Beatoun was a daily marvel to Mrs. Dalrymple, and to all who came in contact with her. On the following Monday poor Nanny Beatoun was buried in the kirkyard of Crichtoun, while her husband was lying utterly unconscious of his loss. It was a question whether in a few days the new-made grave would not need to be reopened to afford him a last resting-place.

The funeral was largely attended, for, in spite of her peculiarities, Mrs. Beatoun of Carlowrie had been held in high respect in the country-side. Mr. Dalrymple and his son Hew were, of course, the chief mourners, and they returned to Lintlaw greatly saddened by the events of the day. Hew went over every morning to Carlowrie, and generally remained the best part of the day, seeing that the work of the farm went on as usual. And at Lintlaw Christian did her very best to fill her mother's place, to make the house comfortable and home-like for her father and the bairns, crushing down her own heart-longings, so as to keep the others bright and cheery. Her father did not say much, but she knew from the glance of his eye, from the way in which he spoke to her, that he was well pleased. Poor Christian, it was a great responsibility for her seventeen years ; and though she tried hard to manage so that there would be no difference in the house, she saw that her father was heart-sick, wandering about, just lost because mother was away. And so strangely in that summer-time began the preparation for the desolation of future years.

For many days Saunders Beatoun lay sick unto death at the Harrow Inn, quite unconscious of the gentle ministrations of Aunt Effie and Elsie. Yet often in his wanderings he would utter the child's name, and always in accents of tenderness and love. Also sometimes he would speak of his brother James and his wife; but, strangely enough, the name of his own wife never passed his lips. At last there came a day in the last sultry week of July, when Saunders Beatoun opened conscious eyes upon the world once more, and the physicians pronounced him saved. He recognised Aunt Effie, and Elsie too, but one thing troubled Mrs. Dalrymple not a little,—that he seemed to have no recollection of what had passed, no curiosity as to how he had come by his illness, no idea even that he was in a strange place at all.

About a fortnight after the turn the doctor said he might with safety be removed in a close and comfortable carriage home to Carlowrie. By this time it was quite evident to Mrs. Dalrymple, and all others who saw him, that he would never again be the man he had been. In fact, his mind was gone. The terrible blow upon the head had softened the brain, and, though comparatively strong in body, Saunders Beatoun was now but a child, —simple, unconscious, often smiling, but scarcely talking one sensible word. This was a great and terrible grief to the family at Lintlaw; but it was hoped that the return home, and perhaps even the shock of his wife's death, which as yet had been kept from him, might work the necessary cure. It was a vain hope. They brought him home to Carlowrie in the calm of the summer-afternoon, but it did not cause even a gleam of intelligent recognition in his eyes. When they told him gently that his wife was gone, he only smiled and answered, 'Ay.' Then it became a question what was to be done with him and with Elsie.

'I will stay with Uncle Saunders. He took care of me, Aunt Effie,' said Elsie, her big eyes shining; 'and I will take care of him now.'

After due deliberation and consultation, it was decided that Mr. Dalrymple and Hew between them would manage the farm, while a sober, trustworthy, kindly woman from Gorebridge was engaged as housekeeper. And in the meantime Elsie was not hindered from fulfilling her desire. So there might have been seen at Carlowrie during the golden days of the late summer, and all through the autumn, the beautiful and pathetic picture of a frail, white-haired man, bent and feeble before his time, and leaning heavily on his stick, being led about by the slender, fair-haired little girl whom he called sometimes Elsie and sometimes Nanny. Sometimes she would take him across the fields to Lintlaw; then the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple grew very sad, while Christian would rush away somewhere to greet, and the bairnies would look with wondering pity at the wreck of poor Uncle Saunders.

It was a strange, mournful life for little Elsie Beatoun, but she was not unhappy, far from it. Even thus early the faithful performance of duty brought with it its own reward; only it made her grow womanly all at once, not so much in appearance as in ways and manner, and she was spoken of in the country-side as a marvel and an example to all the young people round about. So the year waned, and when the chill October winds swept low over the barren stubble fields, those who loved and watched Saunders Beatoun saw him failing every day. The doctor could do nothing for him. It was just a dwining away, which could not be arrested, and which could have but one ending.

Before the year was out Saunders Beatoun fell asleep, very quietly, one Sabbath morning, with them all about his bed, only he never spoke a word, though Aunt Effie thought the last look bent upon Elsie was one of loving recognition and farewell.

When the child's task was over, it seemed only natural that she should go home to Lintlaw. There never was much talk about it; only Mrs. Dalrymple had put the question to her husband, and his answer had been brief; its very brevity told her his heart was deeply moved. So in one little year what changes in Carlowrie! ay, many more than poor Nanny Beatoun had dreamed of when she stood with Christian at the door on that harvest night that Elsie's father died. What money Saunders Beatoun had left, also the proceeds of the roup, which took place in due time, belonged by right to Elsie. David Dalrymple took it in charge, a sacred trust for the orphan child. Hew was now nineteen, and had learned farming so thoroughly under his practical father that he was quite able to manage a place of his own. Carlowrie marched conveniently with Lintlaw; it was endeared to them all by many associations.

The Laird was willing, nay, urgent, for young Hew to try his hand, so it came to pass that by another Whitsunday Hew was farmer of Carlowrie on his own account.

'I am glad you are going to Carlowrie, Cousin Hew,' said Elsie in her quiet way, when they happened to be standing together down at the hedge in front of Lintlaw, looking across the fields, the night it was all settled; 'I can come sometimes with Christian to see it.'

'D'ye like Carlowrie that weel, Elsie?' asked Hew, looking earnestly into the lovely face uplifted to his.

'Yes, Cousin Hew, it and Lintlaw next to father's house at Ormiston.'

Hew stood a long time in silence, looking over to Carlowrie. He could just see the gables of the house and the tops of the stacks above the slope. In that silence there rose up before him a fair and beautiful picture, in which the slender girl by his side was the chief figure.

'What are you thinking about, Cousin Hew? We will need to go in; it is time I was putting Davie to bed,' said Elsie at length.

'I was thinkin', Elsie,' said Hew, bringing his honest eyes back to Elsie's face, and, bending from his tall height, he laid his brown hand on her slender shoulder, 'that if ye lo'e it sae weel ye'll maybe come some day an' bide at Carlowrie.'

But Elsie's eyes met his in a clear, unconscious gaze, and she just turned towards the house with a little smile, not understanding yet the meaning of his words.

CHAPTER V.

THE MINISTER'S WOOING.

ONE evening in early summer, Christian Dalrymple had been over drinking tea with Mrs. Macdougall, the schoolmaster's wife at Borthwick, and was walking home just about sunset. When she got to the railway bridge above Borthwick Mains, she turned about to look at the beautiful picture gilded by the setting sun. On the brow of the hill stood the mighty battlements of Borthwick Castle (where, in stormy times gone by, hapless Mary Stuart had spent one night in her chequered life), the picturesque church and schoolhouse, and the bonnie burnie winding its way through the vale beneath. The primroses grew thickly on the green slopes of the castle bank, and hawthorn, lilac, and laburnum in Currie Glen were all in flower. When she turned again to go on her way, she saw in the distance a figure coming towards her, which she recognised at once as that of Mr. Laidlaw, the minister of Crichtoun. Wondering much what should be taking him so far from home so late in the evening, she went forward to meet him, wishing that her cheeks would not turn so stupidly red. Of late, somehow, Christian had got to feel shy and uncomfortable in the presence of the minister.

'Good evening, Miss Dalrymple,' he said, lifting his hat, and offering his hand. It came quite natural to everybody to say Miss Dalrymple to Christian now, for, though she was just as frank and unaffected and kindly as of yore, she was a young lady now, and there was a certain dignity and stateliness about her which became her beautifully, and which rather awed those who did not know her well. She had developed into a comely and winsome young woman, and it was no marvel the minister of Crichtoun thought her face the most beautiful among the many gathered before him in the kirk every Sabbath day. He was a frequent visitor at Lintlaw, so frequent, indeed, that long ago the tongues of the Newlandrigg and Crichtoun gossips had coupled their names, and spoken of Christian Dalrymple as the future wife of their minister. Christian, of course, never heard any of this gossip, only somehow, of late, her life had grown different; or rather, developed into another fuller and sweeter and more complete. As yet she had been content, not seeking to discover the wherefore.

'Good evening, Mr. Laidlaw. Are you for Borthwick the night?' she asked, with her pleasant smile.

'No; I went to Carlowrie, and Hew told me where you were,' answered the minister, and said no more. Again Christian's cheeks grew red, and she played nervously with the sprig of hawthorn in her hand, picking off its petals one by one, and letting them fall in a snowy shower to the dusty road.

'Well, I'll need to go; Elsie was to come and meet me after milking,' she said a little hurriedly.

'I don't think Elsie will be to-night, Christian,' said the minister, her name falling quite naturally from his lips this time. 'Hew told me, too, that Miss Hamilton was up at Lintlaw in the afternoon, and took your cousin away with her to Tyneholm.'

The minister fancied a slight shadow gathered in Christian's grey eyes, but she answered pleasantly enough,—

'That would be a nice change for Elsie. She has been often at Tyneholm since the Laird's folk came down this time.'

'So I understand. I think it is rather a sore heart to Hew when Elsie goes to Tyneholm,' said the minister, and turning, walked by Christian's side.

It was quite evident that he had come solely for the purpose of meeting her, and somehow the knowledge sent a strange thrill of happiness to her heart.

'Is Mrs. Thomson and the bairns at the Manse yet, Mr. Laidlaw?' she said, referring to the minister's sister, who had been up from Dalkeith for a fortnight at Crichtoun Manse.

'No; they went away yesterday. Walter is Moderator of the Assembly this year, and Lizzie wanted to attend the meetings with him.'

'That is but natural,' smiled Christian. 'How like Mrs. Thomson is to you! Anybody could guess your relationship.'

'So they say. But Lizzie is a better woman than I will ever be a man,' said the minister frankly. 'When I see her in her own home, and hear of the immense good she does in her husband's parish, I wish I had a wife, Christian. Single-handed, a minister works at great disadvantage.'

'That can be remedied easily, Mr. Laidlaw,' said Christian slyly. 'I hear tell whiles that there'll be a flitting from Scotstoun up to the Manse by and by.'

'Miss Ritchie is a very estimable person, but I doubt she would not be so much at home in the Manse as in the dairy at Scotstoun. Besides, though I summoned up courage to ask her, she would probably box my ears or set her big dog after me,' said the minister, entering into his companion's humour. 'I am in hopes that when there is a flitting to the Manse, Christian, it will be from a different quarter;' a speech which effectually silenced Christian, and made her angry with herself for teasing the minister about getting a wife.

By this time they had reached the cross roads, and there Christian stood still.

'I'll just run across the fields, Mr. Laidlaw,' she said, then looked along the Crichtoun road, plainly indicating that that was *his* way, but the minister only smiled his quiet and provoking smile, and opened the gate to let her through into the field.

'It's taking you off your way, Mr. Laidlaw, and I am no' feared,' she said persistently.

'I used to be welcome at Lintlaw at supper-time, Miss Dalrymple. Has the time gone?' he asked a little gravely, and Christian felt a trifle ashamed.

'You know fine you are as welcome as ever at Lintlaw, Mr. Laidlaw,' she said quickly; and they traversed the breadth of two fields in perfect silence.

It was an eloquent silence, however, for the heart of each was speaking to the other, for Christian knew now that she loved the minister, and that she was his chosen wife.

'Yonder's the new moon,' she said by and by, when they reached the summit of a slight eminence in the middle of the biggest field on Lintlaw.

It was rising just above the dark pines on the brow of Crichtoun Hill, and, even as she spoke, a faint, wondrous light stole through the gloaming, and touched her sweet face. But the minister never spoke, and again Christian felt embarrassed, and wished she was safe under the roof-tree at Lintlaw.

'It's the first time I've seen it, and me hasna a penny in my pocket,' she said ruefully. 'You've heard it's unlucky to have an empty pocket when you see a new moon for the first time?'

'Yes, I've heard it; never mind, *I* have plenty. It will do for both,' answered Mr. Laidlaw, smiling; then Christian walked on again this time with quite perceptible impatience and haste.

She felt that something was to happen to her to-night, that a great crisis of her life was at hand, and, maiden-like, she could have flown away from it,—ay, even though she knew it was the very desire of her heart. Presently they came to another gate; once through it, they would be in sight of Lintlaw, but ere Christian could go through it, the minister laid his hand on hers, and gently kept her back.

'Why should you run away from me, Christian? you have known me a long time now,' he said, with something of reproach in his tone.

But Christian never spoke, only stood with her womanly head bowed a little on her breast, knowing that she could not run away any more from the fulfilling of her God-appointed destiny.

After what seemed a long, long silence to Christian, the minister spoke. His words were few, and perhaps not very lover-like, but they came from a heart moved to the very depths.

'Christian, will you flit from Lintlaw to the Manse for my sake?'

Christian could not answer, and her eyes were blind with a mist of tears.

'Have you nothing to say to me, Christian?' asked the minister at length, moving a little nearer, and striving to see her downcast face.

'I am no' worthy, Mr. Laidlaw,' she said at length. 'How could *I* ever be a minister's wife?'

'Not worthy!' The minister took the trembling hands in his firm yet gentle clasp, and bent his manly eyes with unspeakable tenderness on the sweet face.

'Nay, it is *I* who am not worthy to ask you to share my life. I have watched you, Christian, since ever I came to Crichtoun, and your beautiful contentment, your cheerful and ever-ready fulfilling of every duty in season and out of season, has many a time made me ashamed, and, through that very shame, led me to better things.'

'Oh, hush, Mr. Laidlaw!' pleaded Christian. 'You praise me too much, indeed you do.'

'It is not praise, it is simple truth. Everybody except yourself knows you are the very sunshine of Lintlaw,' said the minister, with all a lover's earnestness now, but Christian only shook her head.

'No, no, you must be thinking of mother when you speak of me,' she said softly.

'How humble you are, Christian! and yet I need not be surprised, you have ever been that. But come, I am waiting for my answer yet. It is a lonely house at Crichtoun, Christian; will you come?'

Again there was a silence, and the trembling hands fluttered in the clasp of the minister until one released itself, and, stealing up to his tall shoulder, rested there content. That was Christian's answer; so the minister of Crichtoun took to his heart the wife God had given him, and the first beams of the young May moon witnessed their solemn betrothal.

Meanwhile, at Lintlaw, there was great wondering at Christian's protracted absence. Little dreamed the father and mother of the scene being enacted up at the gate into the Gallowlaw, for if at times they had suspected that it was Christian the minister came to see so often, they had never yet spoken of it to each other. It was close upon ten, and Mrs. Dalrymple was growing very anxious, when the front door opened softly. In the parlour they could hear that Christian was not alone, but, thinking Hew would be her companion, they did not trouble to rise.

'Mother, here is Mr. Laidlaw,' said Christian, pushing open the parlour door; then, as if forgetful of her usual courtesy, she left him to enter alone, and ran away up-stairs.

'We were just thinkin' the lassies had baith run off, Mr. Laidlaw,' laughed the mistress.

'Elsie's bidden at Tyneholm, Miss Hamilton sent up a groom wi' a note; an' we was maist despairin' o' seein' Christian till the morn; whaur did ye fa' in wi' her?'

'At Borthwick, about two hours ago,' replied the minister; whereat Lintlaw laughed in a dry way; in some things he could see a long way farther than his wife.

'Bless me, an' whaur hae ye been? at Carlowrie, or whaur?' exclaimed the mistress.

'Just walking home at our leisure, Mrs. Dalrymple,' said the minister. 'I have been asking Christian to walk a much longer way with me. I am almost afraid to ask, knowing what she is in Lintlaw; but *will* you give me your daughter, Mrs. Dalrymple?'

The mistress looked at him incredulously for a moment, then her clear, kind eyes suddenly overflowed. She could not speak, but she gave him both her hands, for oh, was not this the very life she would have chosen for Christian had she been permitted! Then the minister stooped down and touched with his lips the brow of Christian's mother, and when he spoke his voice had a tremor in it.

'I have no mother, but if you will let me fill the place of a son to you, I may share with Christian the unspeakable blessing of a mother's love. But, Mr. Dalrymple, what will *you* say to all this ?' he broke off suddenly.

'I say God bless you an' my bairn,' said Lintlaw, with deep emotion. 'An' gin she be as guid a wife as she has been a dochter, ye'll never rue the day ye married a Dalrymple.'

Then Christian came in, and, rising, her mother folded her silently to her heart. Ay, that was an hour of solemn, deep happiness at Lintlaw, for what bliss can equal the betrothal of two young hearts under the blessing of God and the approving sunshine of a parent's smile. Was it any wonder, think you, that that night Christian Dalrymple could not sleep for joy ?

CHAPTER VI.

AT TYNEHOLM.

IT was a pretty picture in the long drawing-room at Tyneholm that pleasant summer afternoon. The blinds were drawn to exclude the brilliancy of the sun's rays, and the atmosphere was cool and sweet, being laden with perfume of the flowers which adorned every vase and old-fashioned bowl on mantel and cabinet. At the piano, a new instrument, Keith's last gift to his sister, sat Edith Hamilton, with Elsie Beatoun by her side, and a sheet of music on the rack before them. A little aside stood Keith himself, violin in hand, looking down at the two with a very curious expression on his handsome face.

'Oh, Elsie, Elsie, how stupid you are, dear!'

cried Edith laughingly. 'Let me see you run up the scale. No, no, wrong again. My child, you have no soul for music, and I make you over to Keith as a failure.'

Elsie smiled also, but a flush rose to her fair cheek, and down drooped the lashes over the big dark eyes, for there was a suspicious moisture in them. She had tried so hard, and was so anxious to learn, being envious of Miss Hamilton's musical skill, that it was rather trying to be told she had no soul for music. The years which had but added a little to Christian Dalrymple's dignity and womanliness, had altogether changed Elsie Beatoun. She had grown considerably, but she would never be a tall woman. But her figure had perfected itself, and was all grace. Her face —it was the loveliest in the country-side— perfectly featured, exquisite in hue, framed by that ripple of golden hair, and lit by the solemn dark eyes. It was no wonder that, looking upon her beauty, at times Aunt Effie trembled for the bairn, for oh, is not beauty so often a fatal dower, bringing its possessor either to sweetest happiness or keenest woe? She was plainly dressed in her Sabbath gown, a soft grey merino, with a white ruffle at the throat, and in a moment of caprice Edith had fastened a blush rose at her throat, which rivalled the colour in the cheek of the wearer. Strange and unaccountable was the deep love which Edith Hamilton had for Elsie Beatoun, and, with the capriciousness so often noticeable in persons of delicate health, she would have her at Tyneholm in season and out of season, often against Mrs. Dalrymple's will.

'That is too bad, isn't it, Miss Beatoun?' said Keith, who had made so close and frequent a study of that sweet face that he could read every varying expression. 'Never mind; some day you will be able to play even better than Edith. I am a faithful prophet.'

Elsie smiled again, and rose from her chair.

'I will need to be going away home, Miss Edith,' she said; 'I have stayed too long. I am afraid Aunt Effie will be vexed.'

'Shall I come and make peace for you, dear? Tell Aunt Effie to reserve her scolding for me, for I am coming to see her to-morrow. If you look at her with these eyes, you mite, all her anger, if there is such a thing in Mrs. Dalrymple's nature, will vanish into thin air,' said Edith, and, with her usual impulsiveness, she took the flower-like face in her white hands and kissed it fondly. I am bound to say that Keith looked as if he would have liked to follow her example.

As a matter of course Keith put on his cap and went off to see Elsie safely home. A few minutes after they were gone Mrs. Hamilton came into the drawing-room.

'Elsie is away, mamma. Knowing you were lying down we did not disturb you,' said Edith.

'And where is Keith?' inquired Mrs. Hamilton a little sharply.

'Away with her, of course. Keith is a gentleman, and would not allow even Elsie to go home without an escort.'

'Just so,' said Mrs. Hamilton dryly. 'I do not want to hurt you, Edith, but Elsie Beatoun must not come so often here.'

'Why, mamma?'

'You should not require to ask, Edith. The girl is very pretty and winning in her ways. Keith is a young man, and, like the Cecils, hot-blooded and impulsive. Need I say any more?'

'Why, mamma, are you afraid that Keith falls in love with Elsie?'

'He will, if indeed he is not already in love with her. What else do you suppose makes him so willing to come here, where formerly it needed the utmost persuasion to induce him to accompany us?'

Edith became silent and thoughtful. There was truth in her mother's words, and there were many things, trifles in themselves, but conclusive, which rose up in her mind to confirm it.

Pride of birth was not very strong in Edith Hamilton's nature, and it did not seem to her a very undesirable thing that Keith should love and even marry Elsie.

'Do *you* not love Elsie, mamma?' she asked.

'I do. It would be impossible to be beside her and not love her. That is where the greatest danger lies.'

'Poor Elsie! is she to be punished because she is so lovely and winsome? She would make a sweet mistress of Tyneholm, mamma. I am sure she is a perfect gentlewoman in mind and manners.'

'Edith!' Mrs. Hamilton's tone was very stern, and her face grew dark with passion. 'You forget what you are saying. Do not let your absurd fancy for this daughter of the common people make you forget what is due to your rank. There is greater danger than I thought, seeing you would be inclined to encourage Keith in this folly.'

'How proud you are, mamma,' said Edith. 'You will be difficult to please with a wife for Keith. Of course I was only joking; and I am sure the thought of making Elsie his wife is as far from Keith's mind as it is from yours. Besides, I believe she is engaged, or nearly so, to Hew Dalrymple.'

'That is the husband for her, Edith,' said Mrs. Hamilton, with a breath of relief. 'He is a fine, manly fellow, and she will be happiest among her own people. As a rule, unequal marriages are only productive of misery and discontent.'

'I believe you are right, mamma. But come, tell me to what stately home, Oxenfoord or Prestonhall, Elphinstone or Edmonstone, would you like to see Keith go a-wooing?' asked Edith playfully.

'If Keith will have a Scotch wife, he will find the one I love best at Woodhouselee,' smiled Mrs. Hamilton. 'But the wife I would choose for him is over the border.'

'Oh yes, at Alnwick Hall. But Florence Cecil will never look at our Keith. She just laughs and makes fun of him.'

'Ah, but the lightest heart has often deepest feelings, Edith. But come, we have had enough of this talk. I hope and pray that Keith will be guided in his choice. We have an invitation to dine at Arniston next week. Shall we postpone our departure for the south for a fortnight?'

'I shall only be too willing, mamma,' said Edith. 'Anything to prolong our stay at Tyneholm.'

While the Laird of Tyneholm's settlement in life was thus being discussed by his mother and sister, he was walking home by Elsie Beatoun's side in the sweet summer gloaming, and the expression on his handsome face was not one which would have reassured his mother's heart had she seen it. As for Elsie, she was serenely unconscious that she was of more than ordinary interest to the Laird. She thought it was out of the kindliness of his nature that he walked home with her. As yet her heart was unawakened,—utterly unconscious of her own power,—and therein lay one of her greatest charms. She was a child yet in everything but years.

Between the girls at Lintlaw there never was any foolish talk about lovers and marriage. Christian's nature was too sound and healthful, and she had enough to do with the sober working realities of life, to occupy her mind with dreams and fancies. But she and Elsie also had their own ideal of married life, which by example and precept they had been taught to regard as the highest and holiest and most sacred of human relationships, about which it was something like sacrilege to jest. Such had been the teaching of the mistress of Lintlaw.

Keith Hamilton talked to Elsie Beatoun as he might have done to any of his sister's friends, with courtesy and deference, which did not surprise Elsie, for she had a strong pride of her own, and would have resented anything like patronage or familiarity from Keith Hamilton.

She enjoyed her walk, for he told her about what he had seen in the far lands he had travelled in, and also spoke much of London, which Elsie had a strange desire to see. They had come through the fields, of course, and just at the entrance to the Lady's Road, a leafy lane which skirted the fields of Carlowrie, and led straight up to Lintlaw, who should they meet but Hew Dalrymple with his collie at his heels.

'I was coming to Tyneholm for ye, Elsie,' he said, lifting his cap to the Laird; and Elsie, looking at Hew, wondered what had made him look so vexed and stern. 'Mother bade me. She looked for ye in the mornin'.'

'It was our fault, Edith's and mine, Dalrymple,' said the Laird gaily. 'You must excuse us. Tell Mrs. Dalrymple she must not grudge us a loan of the Flower of Lintlaw.'

Hew scarcely smiled at the Laird's speech. Apart from the fact that it was not complimentary to his own sisters, he resented this calm proprietorship over Elsie, for did she not belong to them? had they not loved and cared for her longest and most faithfully?

'I'll take Elsie home, Mr. Hamilton,' he said quite gravely; and the Laird bit his lips, for the words were a distinct dismissal.

These two young men were rivals, and each knew it. Truly this love works strange havoc in human hearts, and sweeps everything before it.

'Well, good evening, Miss Beatoun. We will see you when you come again to Tyneholm. Good evening, Dalrymple; don't be vexed though others besides you can appreciate sweetness and beauty;' with which parting shaft the Laird lifted his cap and strode away.

Then Elsie and Hew turned and walked side by side in uncomfortable silence. Elsie did not feel happy; it grieved her to look at Hew's moody, downcast face.

'Is Aunt Effie very angry with me, Hew?' she asked timidly at length, when they came to a stile leading into a narrow strip of wood which divided part of the lands of Lintlaw from Carlowrie.

'Angry! no; what for should she be angry, Elsie? only she didna want ye to bide anither nicht at Tyneholm.'

'Are you angry, Hew?' was the next

question, and this time two pleading fingers touched his arm. It was impossible to resist that, and the glimmer of a smile dawned on Hew's sober face.

'Angry wi' *you*, Elsie! that wadna be easy. But tell me, div ye like better to bide at Tyneholm among the braw folk than wi' us at Lintlaw?'

'Oh, Hew, what a question!' said Elsie very indignantly. 'You don't deserve to be spoken to for saying such an unkind thing.'

'Maybe no',' said Hew. 'I say, Elsie, I hae a braw bit o' news for ye. Guess what it is.'

'I never guessed anything in my life; tell it me, Hew,' said Elsie, with smiling, wide-open eyes.

'Weel, oor Christian's to get the minister.'

'Oh, Hew!'

It was a treat to see Elsie's dumbfoundered face.

'True enough. It was a' settled last nicht. Fine, isn't?'

'Yes, Hew; but oh, if Mr. Laidlaw were only not so solemn! Perhaps Christian will make him laugh.'

'He's no' that solemn. My, if ye had kenned Dr. Rogers that was in Crichtoun afore him, ye wadna hae thocht Laidlaw solemn. Father an' mother's high pleased, I can tell ye.'

'And does Christian love him, Hew?' asked Elsie slowly and solemnly, whereat Hew laughed heartily.

'Of course she does; I've kenned that this while. An' the first time the minister came to Lintlaw, he fell in love wi' Christian. I could hae telt ye that as weel.'

'How do you know all these things, Hew?' inquired Elsie, greatly mystified.

'Ay, that's a puzzler. I wish I was in Laidlaw's shoon.'

'Why, you couldn't marry Christian, you stupid Hew.'

'No, but Carlowrie needs a wife as muckle as the Manse, or maybe mair,' said Hew, with a keen side-glance at his companion's sweet face.

'Well, I'm sure there's plenty girls. Susan Pringle at the Mains, Bessie Gray at Southside, or Miss Ritchie at Scotstoun,' said Elsie saucily, following quite unconsciously in

Christian's footsteps. 'Would none of them come to Carlowrie?'

'Maybe they wad, but I'll no' fash them. Like Laidlaw, I'm comin' to Lintlaw by and by to seek a wife,' said Hugh daringly. Then a wave of crimson rushed to Elsie's neck and cheek and brow, and, breaking from him, she ran off across the field and through the stile into the wood which sheltered Lintlaw.

That tell-tale blush had caused a sweet hope to spring in Hew Dalrymple's heart; perhaps, after all, the sweetest dream of his young manhood would, ere long, have a blessed fulfilment.

Aunt Effie had no reproach for the truant; indeed, as Miss Hamilton had said, it was not easy to be angry with Elsie Beatoun.

'I'm very sorry if I stayed too long, auntie, but Miss Hamilton was trying to teach me to play on the piano, and she would not let me away.'

Mrs. Dalrymple looked keenly into Elsie's face, wondering what had brought that lovely flush upon it.

'They are very kind to ye at Tyneholm, Elsie?'

'Very, auntie; we went a long drive yesterday, and as there was no company last night I had my dinner with them; and I had on one of Miss Edith's silk gowns, and a gold chain about my neck. What grandeur, eh, auntie?' laughed Elsie gleefully.

'Ay, truly, ye may say't,' said Mrs. Dalrymple doubtfully; for to what would all this tend? It would not fit the bairn for what she hoped and prayed one day to see her,—Hew's wife, and the mistress of Carlowrie.

'Where's Christian? Hew told me the grand secret, Aunt Effie; I could hardly believe it.'

'It's true enough, thank the Lord; I could wush a' my dear bairns as desirable a doonsittin',' said Aunt Effie, her face shining in its tender motherliness. 'There's nae greater blessin' on this earth, Elsie, than a guid man's honest love. When your time comes, my bairn, dinna mistak' the dross for the gold, for there's mony imitations o't abroad in this wicked world.'

'I'll mind what you say, Aunt Effie,' said Elsie soberly, and went away up-stairs to take off her best gown, and make ready to put

Davie to bed. That had been one of her evening tasks ever since she came to Lintlaw.

'How do you feel, Christian?' asked Elsie that night when they were alone in their own room. 'Tell me what like it is to be engaged to be married.'

'I couldna tell ye, Elsie,' answered Christian, her face so tender, her eyes glowing so, that Elsie was amazed. 'Everything's different. The sun shines brighter, the trees an' the flowers are bonnier; it's just a new world, an' a new life a' thegither; but some day, Elsie, ye'll ken a' aboot it, an' then ye can tell me if I didna speak true.'

CHAPTER VII.

ELSIE'S FAREWELL TO LINTLAW.

CHRISTIAN'S marriage was not to be for a while. She was young enough, her mother said, and she was not prepared to part with her yet. The minister had just to submit. As for Christian, she was perfectly happy; the present was enough for her, and she did not care to fret herself about the future.

In June the Hamiltons went away from Tyneholm, greatly to the relief of more than one heart on their lands. They would not be back till Christmas-time; in the autumn they expected to be travelling again in Spain, and for the first time Mrs. Dalrymple was not sorry when the big house was closed. They had begun to spoil Elsie at Tyneholm; and the keen eyes of the mistress were quick to note that the bairn's light duties at Lintlaw became more of a task to her; also, that she seemed to have grown vainer, and more desirous of fine clothes than she used to be. But when Tyneholm was deserted, and Edith Hamilton, with her sweet, caressing words and ways, and Keith, with his open as well as veiled flatteries, came no more to Lintlaw, Elsie settled down with at least a semblance of contentment.

That was a summer of unspeakable happiness, of deep, calm content, for those under the roof-tree at dear Lintlaw. Never had the laddies learned their lessons so well, never had Effie been so good, so willing to do little things about the house; never had Christian been so much of a pillar in the house; never, indeed, had the relations of that happy family been so perfect. It was a home, indeed, where love and unity prevailed, where parents and children did their utmost each for the other's happiness and comfort. When a bountiful harvest crowned the year, and was safely ingathered both at Lintlaw and Carlowrie, the cup seemed to overflow. It is often thus.

To my thinking, deep joy is often a preparing for as deep a sorrow. It is an oft-repeated truism that a calm ever precedes a storm.

Quietly, but swiftly, the winter slipped away. Christmas passed without bringing the Laird's folk to Tyneholm; and if Elsie was disappointed, she did not show it. But early in March they heard that there were preparations being made at Tyneholm for their return. Then somehow the heart of Mrs. Dalrymple — ay, and of Hew also — grew heavy with an unspoken dread.

One boisterous afternoon towards the close of the month, the carriage from Tyneholm came driving up to Lintlaw, and the coachman delivered a note for Mrs. Dalrymple. It was from Edith Hamilton, and just requested that dear Mrs. Dalrymple would kindly send Elsie back with the carriage, for she was wearying to see her, and was too poorly to go out. Elsie was busy ironing in the kitchen when the carriage came, and she had not heard the wheels among the soft snow. Mrs. Dalrymple read the note, then passed it to her husband, who was reading the paper in his arm-chair.

'Ye'll better bid Elsie get ready then, wife,' he said, as if the matter was quite settled.

'I dinna like Elsie gaun to Tyneholm, Davie. The bairn's best at hame.'

'Hoots, if it pleases Miss Hamilton, it'll dae Elsie nae harm,' said the farmer; but his wife shook her head.

'When Elsie's been at Tyneholm, Davie, she has nae heart for her wark when she comes hame. It's guid for naebody to step oot o' their station, be they high or low. Then there's the Laird, ye ken.'

'What aboot him?' asked Lintlaw rather absently, for he was engrossed with his paper.

'Man, but ye're blind, Davie. The Laird's a young man, an' a'body kens Elsie's bonnie, ower bonnie. I whiles think beauty's mair a snare than a means o' grace, Davie.'

But Lintlaw just laughed at his wife's anxiety.

'Oh, you women folk for spyin' ferlies! Awa', an' bid the bairn get on her bannet, an' no' keep the chap staunin' in the cauld,' he said; and Aunt Effie went away to the kitchen and told Elsie of the summons which had come for her.

Elsie set down her iron, and looked a little ruefully into her aunt's sober face.

'You don't want me to go to Tyneholm, auntie?' she said quickly.

'I wad be tellin' a lee if I said I did; but yer uncle's for ye gaun. So rin and get on yer hat; an' oh, bairn, tak' care o' yersel' at Tyneholm, an' dinna let the braw folk spoil oor Elsie!' said the mistress, with passionate earnestness.

'They will never spoil me, Aunt Effie; at least, they will never make me love you and dear Lintlaw less,' she said impulsively, and ran away up stairs to change her gown; and I must write down that the idea of living once more among the luxury and pleasant idleness at Tyneholm was not by any means repugnant to her.

She found Miss Hamilton lying on a couch in her own dressing-room, looking pale and worn. Her face, however, lighted up with a pleasant smile, and she held out both her hands, when Elsie entered the room.

'Come to me, child; it seems years since I saw your dear face,' she said; and Elsie, kneeling down by the couch, kissed the young lady of Tyneholm as if she had been a sister. When they were alone the difference in their rank was laid aside or forgotten.

'Dear Miss Edith, it grieves me to see you looking so ill,' said Elsie tenderly.

'Ah yes, I am very weak, dear. It was folly to think that I was really well; and yet I felt so strong. We were at Alnwick for Christmas, you know, and they were very gay. I fancy I had too much excitement and pleasure. I am so glad to come home, so glad, Elsie! How I long sometimes to settle down in dear Tyneholm. I am sure that here I should grow quite strong.'

'But you will stay all the summer, now that you have come, Miss Edith?'

But the invalid shook her head.

'Directly I am well, mamma will have me off to London. Poor mamma, she is as fond of gaiety as any girl,—much fonder than I am, indeed,—and I do not like to disappoint her. How nice it is to have you here, and how well you look,—lovelier than ever. Come, tell me what you have been making of yourself since I saw you last.'

'Nothing, Miss Edith. Just working away

at Lintlaw, and sewing a little at Christian's providing.'

'It is true, then, that Christian is to get Mr. Laidlaw? We heard it in Edinburgh. She will make a delightful minister's wife.'

'Yes; I never saw anybody half so nice as Christian,' replied Elsie sincerely.

'Did you not? I am afraid that if I come after all your cousins at Lintlaw, I am not very dear to you, Elsie,' said Edith, a trifle sadly. She was weary and out of sorts, and, as a natural consequence, capricious and even irritable. Though sweet and amiable by nature, Edith Hamilton was inclined to be selfish; and, having been petted and indulged all her life on account of her weak health, this selfishness had grown upon her, and she could scarcely bear to have a whim crossed. It was sad to see one who had so many blessings so thankless for them. She was ever craving for something out of her reach.

'You will stay a day or two, Elsie? I have nobody to cheer me,' said Edith dolefully. 'When one is well and able to receive and return hospitalities, friends are plenty; but not many like a sick-room. That is one of the things the great world has taught me.'

'I often think how happy you must be travelling about seeing so many things and places, Miss Edith,' said Elsie.

'Child, would *you* like such a life? I fancied you as content in your quiet corner as the heartsease beneath the hedgerows about Lintlaw,' exclaimed Miss Hamilton, with a smile.

'Oh, I am content enough,' said Elsie rather confusedly; 'only sometimes it is so quiet at Lintlaw, and Christian is so taken up with Mr. Laidlaw that she is quite lost to me, that I wish for a little change.'

'You shall have it, my child,' said Edith, with a sudden inspiration. 'But come, tell me. We have heard whisperings of a mistress for Carlowrie; are you not the chosen one?'

Up swept the wave of carmine to Elsie's cheek and brow,—

'Indeed I am not, Miss Edith,' she said rather indignantly. 'Whoever told you that spoke just by hearsay. I never heard anything about such a thing.'

'Well, well, I will not tease you,' said Miss

Hamilton, and just then the door opened and Mrs. Hamilton entered the room.

She did not look particularly pleased to see the position of the two girls; nevertheless she greeted Elsie graciously enough. Mrs. Hamilton of Tyneholm, even when most put out, never for a moment forgot her habitual courtesy. Her manners were the perfection of good-breeding.

She inquired kindly for her welfare and that of the inmates of Lintlaw; but when Edith spoke of her remaining a few days she said nothing at all. But, as usual, Edith had her way. By a little skilful diplomacy Mrs. Hamilton managed to keep her son out of Elsie's way during these three days; nevertheless Keith's opportunity came.

The watchful mother had gone to lie down for an hour, Edith had fallen asleep on her couch, so Elsie stole away down to the library for a book wherewith to while away the time. And there she found the Laird writing at the table. She would have run off again, but he sprang up and offered her a chair.

'I must not disturb you, Mr. Keith,' she said confusedly. 'I did not know you were here, or'—

'You wouldn't have come, eh? A most unkind speech,—when I was longing to see you. You have been in the house for two days, and I have scarcely spoken to you. Whose fault is that?' he said gaily, but with an undertone of real earnestness in his voice.

'I don't know. I have been with Miss Edith. Mr. Keith, I think I will go up-stairs again,' said Elsie, looking so lovely in her timidity and shy confusion, that Keith flung his prudence to the winds.

'Nay, you will stay a little with me. Don't grudge me a few minutes, Elsie. I have hungered for a sight of your sweet face for months; and what else do you suppose brought me to this dreary place at this season of the year?' he said passionately, but Elsie had flown.

She was beginning to learn what Aunt Effie had meant by bidding her take care of herself at Tyneholm, for, untutored as she was in the world's ways, she knew that Keith Hamilton had no right to address such words to her, even though his love was as honourable as Hew Dalrymple's own, for between them there was a great gulf fixed.

'Mamma,' said Edith to her mother that night when they were alone, 'I do not think it is true that Elsie is to marry her cousin. I want you to grant me a great, great favour. Promise me before I ask it.'

'If it relates to Elsie, my love, I cannot promise till I hear what it is, not knowing what absurd thing you may ask,' replied Mrs. Hamilton.

'It is a very little thing, mamma. The child is sick of her life at Lintlaw, and she is fitted for something infinitely better.'

'If she is sick of her life at Lintlaw you are greatly to blame, I doubt,' said Mrs. Hamilton gravely.

'Not so, mamma. It is an inborn refinement which cannot accustom itself to uncongenial surroundings. If you were as much with Elsie as I have been, you would be astonished, I can tell you. It is a very little thing I want you to promise; just that you will let me take Elsie to London when we go next month.'

Mrs. Hamilton made no reply, and certainly her face did not give promise of a favourable answer. After a little she said,—

'Edith, you ask not only a very foolish, but even a wrong thing. If Elsie is already wearied of her life at Lintlaw, what will she be when you bring her back from London? My child, I really wish you would not be so unreasonable in your whims,' said Mrs. Hamilton kindly, yet firmly.

She was a sensible woman, and Edith's waywardness tried her sorely. Rebellious tears sprang into the invalid's eyes.

'I have so little pleasure in life, mamma, it seems hard that I should, for no substantial reason, be deprived of Elsie's companionship, which is so great a joy to me,' she said petulantly. 'Other girls have sisters to whom they can talk,—I have no one.'

'My darling, you have Keith and me,' said Mrs. Hamilton gently, and laid her cool hand on her daughter's troubled brow. 'Are we not enough? Have we failed in love and care for you, dear?'

'No; but I have set my mind on this, mamma, and I am afraid I will make myself ill if it is denied me. I know how weak and foolish I am, but I do not seem to be able to help it. Bear with me, mamma, and if you love me grant my request.'

The mother rose with a heavy sigh. She was conquered, but she knew herself weak where she ought to have been strong. So it was tacitly settled at Tyneholm that Elsie Beatoun should go to London. But another and more formidable obstacle lay in Edith's path, for would the Lintlaw folk ever consent to such a thing?

When Elsie went home at the end of the week her head was just full of London, and from several things she let drop, Christian gathered what was in contemplation. She carried it with a very grave face to her mother. The sweet lips of the mistress shut sternly together, and she shook her head decidedly.

'Never wi' my consent, Christian; never while I live,' was all she said.

But the Hamilton will was stronger than the Dalrymple one, so it came to pass that in April Elsie was making her preparations for this momentous visit.

She was eager to be gone, for since the subject had been broached, there had sprung up a strange coldness between her and those who had loved and cared for her so long. She knew she was doing wrong, that with Christian's marriage coming on after harvest, her place was at Lintlaw, but the wayward heart stilled its own misgivings by resolving to work all the harder when she came back in the summer-time. Lintlaw himself was the least concerned of them all. He thought it a fine trip for Elsie, and hoped she would enjoy herself, also he gave her a big cheque (for Elsie had money yet in the bank at Dalkeith) to buy braws, he said, fit for the gaze of the grand folks she was going to London to see. There were times when, looking at the face of her aunt, Elsie felt tempted to abandon all idea of the London visit. The sweet motherly face seemed to be ageing as the days went by, the features growing more sharply outlined, the dear eyes more wearied-looking; and now nobody wondered to hear that she had gone to lie down for a little in the afternoons, or when she went to bed before the reading at nights. These things came so gradually that they did not alarm anybody, though outsiders often spoke of how Mrs. Dalrymple of Lintlaw had failed of late. From the time that it was settled that Elsie should go, until the night before she went away, Hew Dalrymple never came across to Lintlaw. He said he was busy with his sowing, which was true enough, but there was nothing to keep him at Carlowrie on Sundays, and it must have been dreary enough for him in the lonely house after the kirk came out. If Elsie guessed, she never admitted it, but Mrs. Dalrymple and Christian too, knew very well what was the matter with Hew, and they could not help feeling a little sore against Elsie. Altogether that spring-time was a very dreary, uncomfortable season for the Dalrymples, and they felt that the sooner Elsie was away now the better.

Late on the last evening Elsie was to spend beneath the roof-tree of Lintlaw for a long time, Hew came over from Carlowrie. When he opened the front door, the first thing he saw was a big box addressed for London, and his lips set and his eyes grew dark with pain. Poor Hew, nobody but himself knew what he had endured in his loneliness at Carlowrie, for he had lived for months in a state of cruel uncertainty regarding Elsie's feelings; she would not listen to him any time he had tried to broach the subject nearest his heart. But the uncertainty was over now, for if Elsie had loved him, ay, even a tithe as much as he loved her, that box would never have been standing packed in the passage at Lintlaw. To his relief, Elsie was not in the parlour when he went in, and, glad of his father's question about the turnip-sowing on the Back Braes, he sat down and began to talk about his work.

'Ay, an' Elsie's for off the morn,' said Lintlaw in his dry way. 'We'll miss her for a wee, but twa months 'll sune gang by.'

Hew never spoke; but his mother answered for him.

'Hoots, ay, what's twa months?—just a flash, an' it's ower; an' maybe Elsie'll think mair o' Lintlaw an' us quiet folk efter she's seen the big cauld world o' London.'

'Oh, Hew, ye should hae come last nicht an' seen a' Elsie's bonnie goons afore they gaed in the box! My, she'll be as braw as Miss Hamilton hersel'!' exclaimed Effie, looking up from her slate, and heaving a sigh of rapturous envy.

Little though she was, Effie was as vain as Miss Ritchie's peacock at Scotstoun.

To all these remarks Hew made no reply; and presently, when he heard Elsie's foot on the stair, a deep and painful flush overspread his manly face, and he called himself a fool for having come to Lintlaw to-night.

Elsie was very quiet, pale a little also, and her eyes looked as if she had been crying.

'How are you, Hew?' she said, trying to smile, but her lip quivered, and she turned swiftly away lest anybody should see it. Hew did not remain long at Lintlaw, and, declining the offer of supper on the plea that his housekeeper would be waiting up for him, he said good-night to them all, coming last to Elsie. He had made up a little speech on the way over, but it vanished, and he could not speak at all. But that grip of the hand, painful in its intensity, the look in the honest grey eyes, were more eloquent than ten thousand words, and Elsie ran sobbing out of the room. A few minutes later, when Hew was striding across the green to the stile which he must cross into the field, he heard a light footfall behind him, and, to his amazement, there was Elsie. In the bright moonlight, he could see the dewdrops glittering on her lashes, also that she was trembling from head to foot.

'I came—I came, Hew, because I couldn't let you away without speaking to you. Are you very angry, dear Hew? Do you think me a wicked, ungrateful girl?'

'God forbid! Ye ken brawly what I think, Elsie,' said Hew; and it took all his giant strength to restrain the thousand impulses bounding in his heart.

'If you bid me, Hew, I will stay at home, I will indeed!' she said, with such earnestness that there was no mistaking her meaning.

'Elsie! Elsie!' exclaimed Hew hoarsely. 'For God's sake, dinna torment me. Tell me what ye mean.'

'I mean that when I come back, I will come to Carlowrie if you will let me,' she whispered. 'Oh, Hew, could you not see I have loved you all the time?'

So again the young May moon witnessed a solemn betrothal, and an hour later Hew Dalrymple went away home to Carlowrie with the very sunshine of heaven in his heart. As for Elsie, she crept away into the house, and into the arms of Hew's mother, who, regardless of her own weariness, was waiting up, hoping and praying for her boy.

'When I come back, Aunt Effie, I am to be Hew's wife,' she whispered; 'and oh, I will be a better girl than I have ever been; for I have given you many a sore heart.'

'When I come back!' ah! when would that be? Little dreamed Elsie Beatoun, when she lay down with tears of joy in her eyes that night, how many weary days would elapse before she should again look upon Lintlaw, and that when the pleasant family circle again numbered her in its midst, the dearest one of all should be gone for evermore, leaving only an angel memory behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LADY ANNE TRAQUAIR.

AT her escritoire, in the morning-room at Lyndon Priory, sat the Lady Anne Traquair, with a pen in her hand and writing materials before her. She was apparently deeply absorbed in thought, for her eyes were fixed upon the green meadowlands stretching for miles across the flat but picturesque landscape which surrounded her English home. It was a morn of April's sunniest mood; the dewdrops glittered still upon the close-shaven lawn, and upon the fragrant blossoms of the lilac and laburnum; a day, indeed, to gladden the eyes and hearts of all. But the expression upon the face of the Lady Anne was one of discontent and unrest. She was a tall and handsome woman, and though the hair under her elaborate lace *coiffure* was as white as the driven snow, and her face deeply marked with the lines either of sorrow or passion, her figure was still held erect with all the grace and dignity of a queen. It was a remarkable and striking face, which, once seen, would be remembered long. It was very pale, and about the keen black eyes and the firm, stern mouth there were great black shadows, which told of either physical weakness or mental pain. Hers had indeed been a chequered life, marked by many a storm of passion and pain; but the struggle was really over now, and she dwelt a childless widow in the home where she had spent the years of her maidenhood. She only left it occasionally in the spring to spend a few weeks in London; and, though her husband had been a Scotchman, and had taught her to love his native land and his paternal home, the goodly heritage of the Traquairs had not seen its widowed mistress for a score of years.

She was not alone in the room. Near to the fire, which in its ruddy glow vied with the brilliance of the morning sun, sat a poor, thin, subdued-looking woman, past middle life, attired in sombre black, and working with nerveless fingers at a piece of dingy wool-work. She was Deborah Conroy, a distant kinswoman of the Lady Anne's, who, in her poverty, had been glad to accept the offer of a home at the Priory, and whose feeble spirit had long ago been broken by her kinswoman's iron will. She was now simply a machine, a thing who spoke when she was spoken to, and who never ventured nor desired to entertain, much less to express, any opinion of her own. She was not positively unhappy; she lived, and ate, and moved, and, having grown accustomed to the desolation of her life, had ceased to fret, and therefore was at peace. Suddenly the long silence was broken by the voice of the Lady Anne, harsh, discordant, and unmusical.

'I cannot write that letter, Deborah; my pen refuses to move in accordance with my will.'

'Yes, Anne,' said Deborah meekly.

'I have another plan, Deborah,' continued the Lady Anne. 'I shall go to London, and learn for myself what manner of fellow is this

Mr. Howard Traquair who claims kinship with me as the next heir of Traquair.'

'Yes, Anne, that will be a very good plan,' said Deborah, in the same still, passionless voice.

'And if he is what I desire, I shall adopt him as my son at once; and, all being well, I shall go to Traquair in the autumn.'

'Will you, Anne?'

If such a thing were possible, there was a note of surprise in Deborah's voice this time.

'Yes,' said the Lady Anne, with a grim smile. 'After the lapse of twenty years, surely I can look once more upon the place about which I scarcely dared to think till lately. Would you believe there was such weakness about me, Deborah?'

'No, Anne, I would not have believed it,' said Deborah.

'Well, you will make what arrangements are necessary, Deborah; and we will go to London on Monday,' said the Lady Anne, with her usual decision. 'Write first of all to see that the house is put in order.'

'Yes, Anne,' said Deborah; and began

slowly to roll up her needlework, preparatory to obeying her kinswoman's directions.

Then Lady Anne shut her escritoire, and, rising, swept slowly from the room, her long silken robes trailing behind her with a solemn rustling. She crossed the wide corridor, and, turning the key of a baize-covered door which opened into the western wing of the house, entered the picture gallery of the Priory. It was a dim and darkened place, smelling of moth and dust, for its windows were always closed, and the light of day was seldom permitted to shine upon the pictures which adorned its walls. The Lady Anne went up to one of the long windows, undid the fastening, and threw open the shutters; then a flood of glorious sunlight shone in. Upon the walls there were many portraits of the dead and gone Lyndons, but it was at none of her high-born ancestors the Lady Anne had come to look. She walked swiftly to the further end of the long gallery, to a little niche wherein hung a picture with its face turned to the wall. Mute history-teller! Silent, but eloquent proclamation of a skeleton on the hearth—a tragedy in the home! With trembling hand the Lady Anne turned the face of the picture to the light, sending a cloud of dust down upon her lace head-dress and her silken gown. It was the likeness of a young girl, with a lovely child-like face, framed in golden hair, and lighted by large dark eyes in which shone the very soul of purity and truth. What had that fair child done to merit so great and sad a punishment? What painful or shameful memories did that lovely face recall, that it should be turned away from public view? Ah! what indeed? The Lady Anne looked long at the picture, not a muscle of her set face moving, but it grew, if possible, paler than before. Her slender fingers were nervously interlaced, and she trembled in every limb. Ay, that proud heart was stirred to the deepest depths, and all the unspeakable, unquenchable yearnings of a mother surged in her breast. A deep groan broke from her lips, and great beads of perspiration stood out in the furrows on her brow, telling how great was the agony of the moment.

'Fool! fool that I was to come here!' she muttered, and, hastily restoring the picture to its former position, hurriedly left the place;

and her step, as she sought her own room, lost its stately dignity, and became like the feeble gait of age.

That day poor Deborah Conroy found her kinswoman more irritable and trying and exacting than she had ever been during the ten dreary years of her sojourn with her. Every evening at six o'clock these two solitary women dined together in solemn state, for Lady Anne Traquair was rigid in the observances of all the ceremony in keeping with her rank. She dressed for dinner, and even poor Deborah Conroy, by long custom, had got to find a certain placid satisfaction in donning her best silk gown, and fastening a broad lace collar about her neck, to sit down at the table with her high-born kinswoman.

While they were partaking of their unsociable meal that evening, they were disturbed by a loud knock at the hall door, and presently a message was brought to the effect that a gentleman waited in the library for Lady Traquair.

'Tell him I will be with him in half an hour,' said her ladyship. 'But stay; did he give his name?'

'Yes, my lady,—Mr. Howard Traquair,' said the servant respectfully.

Then, to the amazement of all, her ladyship rose hastily and immediately quitted the room, leaving Deborah Conroy to the companionship of Walters, the solemn-faced, statuesque butler, who was part of the dreary ceremonial observed every evening in the dining-room at Lyndon Priory. Lady Anne was much agitated; indeed, she had to pause before opening the library door, in order to recover that dignity and repose befitting her rank and age. When she entered the room, she beheld, standing in the wide, low window, the tall, well-knit figure of a young man, who immediately turned to her a frank, open, noble face, bearing so close a resemblance to her dead husband that for a moment she felt like one in a dream. He looked keenly at her haughty face, and the sunny smile which had started to his lips died away, and he bowed gravely.

'Lady Anne Traquair?' he said courteously.

She bowed, and waved her hand to a seat; but the young man preferred to stand during the momentous interview about to take place.

'My servant brought to me the name

Howard Traquair,' she said somewhat icily. 'Am I to understand that you are the writer of the extraordinary communication bearing that signature which I received this morning?'

'I am Howard Traquair, Lady Anne, the only son of Donald, brother to your late husband, Sir Howard Traquair of Traquair and Glenshee,' said the young man, with quiet and manly grace. 'Will you permit me to offer you a chair while I relate to you the events which have led up to this visit?'

The Lady Anne bowed, and sank into the chair placed for her. The very voice was that of her idolized husband, and it stirred in her heart at once the sweetest and most bitter waters of memory.

'You are aware, of course, Lady Traquair, that your husband and his brother Donald had a bitter quarrel in their youth, which created a breach between them, never to be healed this side the grave?'

'It was never healed, but it was Donald's fault; my husband was blameless,' said the Lady Anne, almost in a whisper.

'You are right. At the time of the quarrel Donald Traquair left Scotland and settled in

London, penniless, as you must be aware; and, having married late in life, he was obliged to earn a livelihood for himself and his wife. He only lived a few years; the drudgery of work in a merchant's office killed him; and he died, leaving a widow and two children, a boy and girl. The widow struggled on alone, and managed to rear and educate her children till they were able to help themselves. Worn out with the struggle, she died also in London, in the first week of the present year. On her deathbed she revealed to her children her family history, which till then had been a sealed book to them. That history, Lady Anne, induced me to make some inquiries, and has brought me here to-day to claim relationship with you. I am Howard Traquair, your nephew.'

'And the other? You spoke of two children,' said Lady Traquair nervously, for she was labouring under intense excitement.

'She is living still, and has her home in London with me. My sister's name is Marjorie Traquair.'

'And you, what do you do? How have you supported yourself and her?'

'I am a mercantile clerk, Lady Traquair,' he said, without hesitation or shame, though he saw the flush of pride mount to the cheek of his haughty kinswoman.

'Your story is plausible enough, but it requires proof. Have you any papers belonging to your father, boy?' said the Lady Anne, with difficulty.

'Yes; they are in the possession of a firm of London solicitors, Lady Traquair, and can be submitted for your investigation when you please. I brought nothing with me, hoping that my likeness to my uncle Howard would be proof sufficient. My mother told me I was his living image.'

'You *are* like him; but there are chance resemblances in the world which are sometimes turned to advantage by unprincipled persons,' said her ladyship grimly. 'I will not commit myself, Mr. Howard Traquair, until I have paid a visit to London, and made all necessary inquiries.'

'Very well, Lady Anne. May I express a hope that when you do come to London you will honour Marjorie and me by a visit to our abode? My sister will make you truly welcome.'

Lady Traquair bowed somewhat distantly, but her heart was stirred to the very depths. It went out to this young man, who had all the bold fearlessness of her husband's race, in a rush of tenderness such as she had not experienced for many years. She rang the bell, and ordered some refreshment to be laid down in the library for the gentleman, and then, bidding him good afternoon, returned to the dining-room. She signed to Walters to leave the room, and sank weakly into an arm-chair on the hearth.

'I have received a great shock, Deborah, and I am very weak. It is a terrible thing to be growing old. Bring me a cup of tea, and then do you give orders that a carriage be got ready to convey the gentleman in the library to the station. Also hasten your arrangements, for we must travel to London to-morrow.'

Deborah Conroy was a person of methodical habits, and she it was who managed the house-keeping at Lyndon Priory. Her post was no sinecure, for Lady Anne was difficult to please, and did not spare her humble dependent either labour or anxiety. But so well did Deborah manage, that before the clock struck the early hour for retiring to rest, there stood in the outer hall a great quantity of luggage addressed to Lady Traquair's house in Eaton Place, London. What did it matter that the poor soul was too wearied to sleep? She was not the only restless being in the Priory that night, for the Lady Anne never closed an eye. Her nerves were unstrung, her whole being stirred, and there seemed to overshadow her some great crisis, which was to change her life.

Could it be that the feeble body was to rebel at last against the iron will? and was it the shadow of death which stood afar, bidding her set her house in order, and prepare for that which was to come?

By noon next day they were on their way to the city of wealth and fashion. Lady Anne was herself once more, stately and cold and haughty, while poor Deborah was in a condition of nervous excitement regarding luggage and sundry other things, for the safe transit of which she would be held responsible. They arrived in London about six o'clock in the evening. The distance was not great, but the locomotive had not then attained its present state of marvellous perfection. Indeed, it was only between important centres of trade that trains were run at all. Lyndon was on the main line between London and Manchester, and on that account was considered by some a very desirable place of abode.

The fashionable thoroughfares were emptying for the day, and when the Lady Traquair's carriage approached her London abode, it became only one among many dainty and elegantly - appointed equipages. As they passed up St. James's Square, a neat park phaeton, drawn by two lovely ponies, drew up just before them in front of one of the stately mansions in the Square. It held two ladies, and just as Lady Traquair's carriage swept past, they lowered their sun-shades and she saw their faces.

'Anne, Anne! what is the matter with you? Have you taken a fit?' exclaimed Deborah Conroy, alarmed at the deathly pallor which overspread the face of her kinswoman.

'No; but I have seen the face of the dead, Deborah Conroy,' she said, in a hollow voice; then starting up with sudden energy, she pulled the little silver bell to attract the attention of the coachman. To the footman she said, 'Go back and inquire who resides in the house where the phaeton has just stopped.'

The man looked amazed at the unusual command, but obeyed at once. In a very few minutes he again appeared at the carriage window and touched his hat.

'It is the town house of Mrs. Patrick Hamilton of Tyneholm, Midlothian, my lady,' he said.

'Thanks, drive on,' she said, then sank back among the cushions, repeating the address over and over.

Deborah Conroy looked on in helpless alarm, greatly fearing that her kinswoman had brooded over the sorrows and shadows of the past until her mental powers had broken down.

CHAPTER IX.

MY GRAND-DAUGHTER!

'WHERE did you get that necklace, child? It is most beautiful.'

It was Edith Hamilton who spoke, and she was looking with admiring eyes at a chain of gold, with a pendant attached, exquisitely designed, and set with pearl and sapphire.

'It was my mother's, Miss Edith,' replied Elsie Beatoun. 'It is the only thing I have of any value belonging to her.'

She was lying on a couch, with her golden hair, loosened from its clasp, lying about her like a halo; and her face was pale, her eyes wearied, telling that the country blossom was drooping in the air of the sultry town.

'It is a very valuable thing, Elsie, not like the usual articles of jewellery possessed by a country doctor's wife,' continued Miss Hamilton, examining the trinket yet more closely. 'Why, child, do you know that on every link there is a letter set in pearls? This is curious indeed. Did you know of it?'

'Yes, Miss Edith,' said Elsie listlessly. 'All the letters put together read, "After dishonour death." My cousin Hew spelled it out for me one night at Lintlaw.'

'I must ask Keith to what family that crest and motto belong. He knows all that kind of things,' said Miss Hamilton decidedly. 'Was there never any mystery about your birth, Elsie?'

'None,' smiled Elsie. 'We concluded at Lintlaw that my mother had got it from some of the great ladies round about Ormiston. She was greatly beloved by everybody.'

'Ah, that is a very likely explanation; still I shall ask Keith. Well, my child, are you really unable to go out with me this afternoon?'

'If you would be so kind, Miss Edith, I would gladly lie still a little; my head aches badly, and I feel so wearied. I don't know what to do.'

'That is bad. They were telling me in the Row yesterday that my Scotch rose was losing its bloom; we mustn't send you back a lily to Lintlaw, must we, Elsie? Well, good-bye; try to sleep, and be fresh for the evening. I want you to look your very loveliest this evening for my friends.'

Such words of honeyed flattery might well have turned a wiser head than Elsie Beatoun's, but though she had enjoyed for a little the wonderful change this was to her, her heart was at home with Hew and the dear ones at Lintlaw. She had scarcely been a month in London, but already her pure eyes had seen through the hollowness of this great world, the worthlessness of its friendships, the meanness and littleness of its aims, its utter incapacity to satisfy even one craving of a human heart. How sweet and wholesome and altogether desirable seemed the quiet working life at Lintlaw, where every hour of every day brought its attendant duty, and where idleness was a thing despised, in comparison with this giddy round of pleasure-seeking, the whirl of gaiety, the fleeting, unsatisfying excitement of ball and rout and play to which Edith Hamilton had out of her caprice introduced her. This visit had done Elsie a world of good. In four short weeks she was thoroughly cured of her longings after the life of a fine lady, and now nothing on earth seemed so lovely and desirable in her eyes as to be home once more at Lintlaw, helping Christian to sweep, and dust, and iron, and bake, taking the cows to and from the pasture, and being initiated by Aunt Effie into all the mysteries of the dairy. Then the Sabbaths in the dear old church of Crichtoun, listening to the preaching of Christian's Mr. Laidlaw, and the singing of old Thomas Adams, who was precentor and sexton and everything but minister of Crichtoun. How different from the strange institution here called the Sabbath, but which only differed from other days in the one attendance at the neighbouring Episcopalian Church of St. Peter's, which Elsie thought a terrible heathenish place, just like the Roman Catholic Church in Edinburgh, about which Uncle Davie spoke with so much abhorrence. It was about all these things Elsie was thinking, and her heart was filled with unspeakable yearnings for all she had loved and left in bonnie Scotland, when Mrs. Hamilton disturbed her solitude.

'I am sorry you are indisposed, Elsie,' she said kindly. 'Nay, lie still, dear. I have just come to have a little talk with you. Edith monopolizes you so that there are few opportunities.'

Elsie smiled slightly, and laid her head back upon her pillow somewhat reassured. She stood rather in awe of the Laird's mother, and felt intuitively that it was not of her will that she was with them in London. Yet she could not complain of coldness, for Mrs. Hamilton was ever kind and courteous, only there was a something distant in her demeanour which contrasted sharply with the frankness of her children.

'Are you tired of London life, Elsie? You look fatigued and a little nervous.'

'I have not been well to-day, Mrs. Hamilton, and I was thinking of home; it made me a little sad, that is all,' replied Elsie simply.

'Then you would like to go home, my child?' said Mrs. Hamilton, bending forward with unmistakeable eagerness.

'It seems ungrateful, after all the kindness I have received from you and Miss Edith,' said Elsie. 'But you see I have not been used to this kind of life, and I am most at home among my own people.'

'I am glad Edith has not spoiled you,' said Mrs. Hamilton, with satisfaction. 'Elsie, will you answer me a question truly? It is of great importance to me.'

'I will do so, Mrs. Hamilton, believe me,' said Elsie sincerely.

'Then, Elsie, tell me, has there been any foolish talk of love between the Laird and you? Nay, do not blush so painfully. If there has, it has not been of your seeking, I am persuaded.'

'I will be true, Mrs. Hamilton,' said Elsie calmly, though she trembled a little. 'Mr. Keith has spoken words of love to me, but I have never listened. You will believe me, madam, I knew too well what was befitting my position and his, and I would never have done so great a wrong to you, as to listen to any serious words he might have said.'

'You are a good girl, Elsie; tell me all. What has Keith said to you?'

'I don't know that I am doing right to tell,' said Elsie, struggling with some rebellious tears. 'He asked me to be his wife, Mrs. Hamilton, both here in London and at Tyneholm, before we came away, but I could never consent, even though there had not been such a difference between us, because'—

'Because what, Elsie?'

'Because I do not love Mr. Keith, Mrs. Hamilton, and I do love my cousin Hew Dalrymple, whose wife I am to be some day soon after I get back to Lintlaw.'

The lady of Tyneholm breathed a sigh of relief, and stooping, took the slender figure in her arms, and gently kissed her brow.

'You are a good, brave, true-hearted girl, Elsie Beatoun, and may God bless you, and the noble young man you are to wed. You have seen something of the world here, my dear, and you can see that it is not the custom for those in our circle to take wives from yours. It would have caused a great deal of trouble.'

'I know, but I never thought of it even for a moment, Mrs. Hamilton,' said Elsie, with quiet dignity. 'Do you think I could go home to Scotland by myself before you return to Tyneholm? I have got to feel heavy-hearted somehow about them, especially about Aunt Effie. Christian said in her letter that she was very anxious about her.'

'It would be quite impossible for you to return alone to Scotland, my dear, but I will at once see about an escort for you. If I cannot find any one going, I shall send Mrs. Logan with you. She would be leaving in a week or two anyhow to get Tyneholm in order for us.'

'Thank you,' said Elsie gratefully, for Mrs. Hamilton was truly kind. There was a vein of self-interest in this act of kindness, however, which Elsie was not sufficiently versed in the world's ways to detect. Mrs. Hamilton trembled for her son. He was headstrong, like all the Cecils, and would not readily give up anything on which he had set his heart. She would only feel at rest when Elsie was reigning at Carlowrie as Hew Dalrymple's wife.

Presently a servant disturbed their interview, saying there was a visitor in the drawing-room. Mrs. Hamilton looked at the card handed to her, and a slight expression of surprise crossed her face. She had no acquaintance with the Lady Anne Traquair, and marvelled what could be the meaning of this visit. She went down at once, however; then Elsie languidly rose, and proceeded to bathe her face and hands in cold water, and then to change her gown, ready for Miss Hamilton's afternoon tea, at which light repast she was generally joined by some of her lady friends. Elsie could not account for the strange load oppressing mind and heart. She just felt as if some great sorrow were about to overtake her.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hamilton had entered her drawing-room, and saw standing in the window the tall and stately figure of a lady whom she had never seen before. From behind, the figure looked so youthful that she was startled when the lady turned her face, it was so worn and haggard and grey, and ploughed deep with the furrows of pain. A slight bow passed between the ladies; then without noticing Mrs.

Hamilton's courteous request to take a chair, Lady Traquair spoke in an abrupt, strange, harsh voice, very different from the musical intonation of the lady of Tyneholm.

'You will doubtless be surprised at my call, Mrs. Hamilton, and still more so when I tell you its object. Passing up Eaton Place in my carriage yesterday afternoon, I saw at your door a phaeton containing two ladies, one of whom bore so striking a resemblance to one who was very dear to me, that I could not rest until I made some inquiries regarding her. Will you kindly tell me who and what she is? Believe me, I am actuated by no mere curiosity; it is a matter of vital importance to me.'

What she said was true, for she was trembling from head to foot, and with difficulty commanded her voice throughout her speech.

'My daughter drove in the park yesterday afternoon, Lady Traquair, and her companion was a young girl to whom she took a fancy in Scotland, the daughter of a country doctor, who, at his death, found a home with one of the farmers on our estate of Tyneholm,' said

Mrs. Hamilton courteously, and beginning to feel interested, and even excited.

'A country doctor!—his name!—tell me his name!' said the Lady Traquair hurriedly.

'Beatoun. He practised in the neighbouring village of Ormiston. The child's name is Elsie.'

'I knew I could not be mistaken,' fell brokenly from the lips of the Lady Anne, and, sinking into a chair, she covered her face with her trembling hands.

Mrs. Hamilton stood looking on in considerable perplexity, not knowing what to think of the behaviour of her strange visitor.

'Will you let me tell you a story? I will be brief, Mrs. Hamilton,' said the Lady Anne, suddenly looking up, and with a strong effort of her iron will she regained her habitual composure. 'I am now a childless and desolate widow. Two-and-twenty years ago I lost my husband, but I had then a child, who was a consolation in my grief. You are a mother, madam, therefore I need not tell you how I loved her. She was the light of my eyes, the sunshine of my home, all I had on earth. I was ambitious for her, because she was so fair, and because of her name and lineage. I had a right to desire for her an honourable settlement in life. I was disappointed. We spent the greater part of the year then at Traquair, because my husband loved it beyond any spot on earth, and for his sake it was dear to us. In the neighbouring village there was an aged doctor, who had been the family physician of the Traquairs for many years. Being unfit, through declining years, to overtake all his work, he procured an assistant, an able and handsome young man. His name was Beatoun. Do you follow me?'

Mrs. Hamilton bowed, and the expression on her face betrayed her absorbing interest.

'I will not weary you with details of what followed. Suffice to say that my daughter, the child of so old and honourable a house, stooped from her high estate to listen to words of love from this young man. I discovered it, and as it was fitting, nay, incumbent upon me to do, I tried to put an end to the affair. It was useless. After months of strife and estrangement, she left me for him, and they were married. I never saw her face again;

but I learned, by accident, that she died a few years after her marriage, but I was unable to ascertain whether she left any children.'

'I am overwhelmed with surprise,' said Mrs. Hamilton. 'Doctor Beatoun did not long survive his wife, and Elsie was their only child. She was taken care of for some time by a brother of her father's, also a tenant on our lands. But he came to an untimely end through an accident, and then Elsie found a home with the Dalrymples of Lintlaw, the farmer's people to whom I referred before.'

The Lady Anne bowed.

'How is it she comes to be here with you?'

'My daughter took a fancy to her when we were in Scotland, and the whims of a delicate person have to be humoured, Lady Traquair. You have come most opportunely, for I was about to make arrangements for her return to her friends. She is home-sick, poor child. What course do you intend to pursue?'

'She is my grand-daughter, Mrs. Hamilton, and henceforth her home will be with me. She had no claim upon these people of whom you speak; but I shall see that they do not go unrewarded,' said Lady Traquair. But Mrs. Hamilton smiled a little sadly.

'I am afraid any reward you may offer will be refused. Nothing will make up to them for the loss of Elsie,' said she, but did not let Elsie's secret out of her keeping.

There was time enough. Oh yes, time enough; and Mrs. Hamilton foresaw many an hour of pain coming for Elsie. The unbroken sunshine of her girlhood, the calm, sweet, beautiful life among those true Scottish hearts, were over now for ever. Involuntarily the lady's eyes filled with tears.

'You will, I presume, desire to see Elsie?' she said at length.

'If you please.'

'You will wait a little till I prepare her for what is coming; she is nervous and out of sorts to-day,' said Mrs. Hamilton.

'I will; but be as brief as possible, Mrs. Hamilton. I am an old woman, and patience is not one of the crowning virtues of age.'

With slow and heavy step the lady of Tyneholm ascended the stair to Edith's dressing-room. The task before her was one from which she shrank, for she could not think that the news that there was one with a nearer claim upon her than those at Lintlaw would be a pleasure to Elsie Beatoun *now*. Ah no! for her heart had found its best love and rest across the border by the green and flowery braes of Crichtoun.

'Elsie, my child, there is a lady in the drawing-room wishing to see you,' she said, plunging into the subject at once. 'You must be prepared for a very great surprise, my love. I hardly know how to break it to you.'

The lovely face flushed deeply. Oh, how fair she looked in her sweet, cool muslin dress, with its trimmings of lace! how desirable for either man or woman to see in a home!

'My dear, do you know nothing about your mother's life or history previous to her marriage? Has no one ever told you?'

'Lisbeth Fairlie used to tell me often that the best blood in Scotland flowed in my veins; and I have heard that my mother's was a runaway marriage, Mrs. Hamilton,' replied Elsie, with wondering eyes. 'But I thought it was just a romance of Lisbeth's foolish brain.'

'It was true, Elsie; your mother was a Traquair, child, the only daughter of Sir Howard and Lady Anne Traquair of Traquair and Glenshee. My dear girl, this is likely to be an eventful visit for you.'

'Well, but what is all this about, Mrs. Hamilton? Who is downstairs?' asked Elsie, beginning to tremble, she could not tell why.

'Can you not guess, my dear? Be calm; don't look at me so strangely. It is your grandmother, who is waiting to fold you to her heart. Come, let me take you to her.'

Like one in a dream, Elsie allowed herself to be led downstairs. She was unable, as yet, to comprehend this strange thing which had befallen her. She followed Mrs. Hamilton timidly into the room, and her eyes travelled with one swift glance to the face of the woman waiting there. Then a cry rang through the stillness, wrung from the yearning depths of the desolate old woman, who saw before her the living image of the daughter who, in her eyes, had brought great dishonour upon the house of Traquair.

'Come to me, Elsie, my child, my darling, I am your grandmother,' she said; and the next minute she gathered the slender figure in her arms with a clasp which seemed to say, 'I will never let you go.'

It was prophetic of the struggle to come. The bitter conflict with an indomitable will; the sore, sore battle between love and duty, which in years gone by had so riven the heart of poor Elsie Traquair, was destined to be repeated in the experience of her child, with what ending who could tell?

CHAPTER X.

NEWS OF ELSIE.

MISS RITCHIE'S peacock had taken what she called a stravagin' turn, and could not be seen about the doors nor in the barnyard at Scotstoun. Immediately after the twelve o'clock dinner, Miss Ritchie left her brother snoozing in his armchair, and emerged forth in search of the truant bird. She wandered up the Moss Road, eyeing the fields on either side, and thence up to the Camp Wood. Now the day was warm, and Miss Ritchie wore a gown of thick linsey-woolsey, so that she found her ascent up the stony way rather toilsome. She went a few yards into the wood, calling her pet by his name, and also anathematizing him in an undertone to herself, as a 'wanderin' crater,' a 'stravagin' brute,' and sundry other epithets peculiarly her own. That King John should have wandered to-day was particularly aggravating to Miss Ritchie, for she had it in her mind to take a walk up to Lintlaw in the afternoon, and perhaps drink tea with Mrs. Dalrymple. Miss Ritchie had not many friends in the neighbourhood, for she was rather an eccentric being; but the gentle mistress of Lintlaw had found the right side of her, and had a warm liking and respect for her. The bairns poked fun at her old-fashioned clothes, her plain appearance and abrupt manner, but they all liked well enough to pay a visit to Scotstoun, for Miss Ritchie's pantry held many wonderful and tasty bites made by her own skilful hands. Her brother was just as eccentric as herself, and they lived in a state of harmless warfare with each other, which was very amusing to outsiders. After an hour's fruitless search, she returned to Scotstoun, out of breath and out of temper, and encountered her brother in the fair way to set the men their afternoon's work.

'Whaur hae ye been, Ailie?' he asked, with a comical smile.

'Oh, ye ken fine. Whaur could I be but awa' huntin' efter that ill beast?' she snapped. 'He's a perfect plague.'

'Whaur did 'e gang to look for him, Ailie?' asked Geordie Ritchie slyly.

'Gang! I've been ower every field on Scotstoun, an' cryin' him through the Camp Wud as weel,' quoth Miss Ritchie grimly. 'I'se warrand I'll thraw his neck when he comes hame.'

'I'll tell 'e what, Ailie, if ye gang up to Newland Burn, ye'll find him sittin' on Robbie Blair's midden-dyke, I could lay ye a saxpence,' said Scotstoun slyly.

'Ye're a perfeck fule, Geordie Ritchie,' said Ailie scornfully; nevertheless the colour rose in her cheek, and she was fain to move on to the house to hide it. It was common talk in the country-side just then that Robbie Blair was courting Geordie Ritchie's sister, and it was looked upon as a very suitable match. Having tidied up the parlour, and given what directions were required, Miss Ritchie dressed herself in her second best, and went away about three o'clock to Lintlaw.

When she got to her own road end, she

bethought herself that she might as well see whether King John had really landed at Newland Burn, especially as Geordie Blair would be sure to be busy in his hay field, and would not be likely to see her.

Miss Ritchie was a person who never hesitated long over anything, so she went past Lintlaw road end, and turned up the leafy lane to Newland Burn. And there, sure enough, was King John, airing himself with his magnificent tail fully spread on the top spar of the garden gate. He quickly lowered it, however, at sight of his mistress, and flew to meet her. He was as tame as were the pigeons at Lintlaw, and they hopped about the kitchen floor quite familiarly. Miss Ritchie administered a severe reproof to King John, and he followed her quite demurely up the road, just as a dog might have done. So she had just to take him with her to Lintlaw.

Miss Ritchie had to pass the hay field in order to get into the path leading to Lintlaw, and of course Robbie Blair must needs be standing near the gate when she approached. Miss Ritchie drew down her thick spotted veil, and marched bravely on, King John following consequentially in the rear.

'It's a fine afternoon, Miss Ritchie,' said Robbie Blair, who was a big strapping fellow, who might have won any woman's fancy. 'It wasna fair o' 'e to pass my door.'

'I'm gaun on a parteekler errand to Lintlaw, Mr. Blair,' said Miss Ritchie somewhat stiffly. 'I had to come round this way seekin' for Jock. He's a stravagin' beast; it's half my wark lookin' efter him.'

'Jock often comes here. I whiles think he likes Newland Burn better than Scotstoun. I wish the same could be said o' his mistress,' said Robbie Blair, plucking up more courage than he had ever shown before.

'Weel, I'm sure Scotstoun yett gets the sun better nor yours; but Jock's a fule, like the lave o' the men folk,' quoth Miss Ritchie brusquely, and strode away. Her manner might well have disconcerted any suitor but easy-going Robbie Blair; he was in no hurry, and did not despair of one day persuading the worthy housekeeper of Scotstoun to become the mistress of the cosy biggin' at Newland Burn. By the time Miss Ritchie reached

Lintlaw, she had quite recovered her temper and her self-possession, and was able to show Christian a placid and unruffled countenance when she opened the door to her.

How sweet and neat and comely looked Christian in her new calico dress, with spotless linen collar and cuffs, and dainty apron, which she had embroidered with her own hands! It was always refreshing to see Christian Dalrymple, and, like many more, Miss Ritchie thought there was not her equal in the countryside.

'Is yer mither weel, Kirsten?' she asked when she was ushered into the pleasant parlour, which was made cool and fragrant with the flowers which filled the vases on the mantel and the big China bowl on the sideboard.

'Just as usual, thank you, Miss Ritchie. She aye lies down for a wee in the afternoons now,' replied Christian.

'Come and take off your bonnet, and you can crack to me till mother comes down. She will not be long; she likes her tea at four now. A perfect old wife mother is turning.'

'I'll jist lay my bonnet down here,' said Miss Ritchie. 'I'll no' bide lang. Ye look weel, Kirsten. The thocht o' matrimony's surely greein' wi' ye.'

Christian blushed slightly, and took up her stocking without making any reply.

'What made ye bring King John wi' ye, Miss Ritchie?' she asked, seeing his majesty strutting about the green in front. 'I never knew of anybody taking a peacock out to drink tea before.'

'I couldna help it; he's the stravaginest beast. I got him at Newland Burn, an' was obliged to bring him. But whaur hae ye gottin' this bonnie wee crater?' queried Miss Ritchie, rising to examine more closely a beautiful yellow canary hanging in a pretty cage above their heads.

'Elsie sent that to Davie, just after she went to London,' said Christian, and somehow her voice took a sadder tone. 'It wad make ye laugh to see the work mother makes wi' Dickie, jist because Elsie sent it.'

'When did ye last hear frae Elsie, Kirsten?' inquired Miss Ritchie, with eagerness.

'It's a lang time,' said Christian, and her soft eyes filled with tears. 'If we didna ken her sae weel, we could think she had forgotten us 'mong the braw folks. I'm wae for Hew, Miss Ritchie, he's that dowie. It's no' richt o' Elsie no' to write to him.'

'She was in Lunnon when ye last heard?' said Miss Ritchie.

'Yes,' answered Christian, in some surprise. 'We hear they're comin' to the big house next month, so we'll surely see her then.'

'I had a letter this mornin', Kirsten, frae my cousin Betsy Ritchie, wha, as ye hae heard me say, is a cook in England wi' Leddy Traquair at Lyndon Priory. There's unco news aboot Elsie in't, Kirsten.'

Christian's knitting fell to her lap, and her sweet eyes dilated with sudden dread.

'News o' oor Elsie in a letter from Betsy Ritchie!' exclaimed she, in consternation. 'Guid or bad? tell me quick, Miss Ritchie.'

'It's no' easy kennin' whether it's guid or bad, Kirsten, though some wad ca'd guid fortune for Elsie. Ye hae heard, of course, that Doctor Beatoun's marriage was a rinawa' ane, an' that his wife was o' gentle folk. It seems she was a Traquair, Kirsten, an' her mither the Lady Anne, Betsy's mistress, has fa'n in wi' Elsie in Lunnon, an', bein' her gran'mither, has claimed her, an' ta'en her awa' hame to Lyndon. So it's as like as no' ye'll no' see muckle o' her noo.'

Christian stared in bewilderment, and then covered her face with her hands. It was a terrible blow to her, and what would it be to her mother and Hew, to whom Elsie was doubly dear?

'She should have written. She will write yet to tell us about this strange thing which has befallen her,' she said at length. '*Will* it be true, Miss Ritchie, think ye?'

'True as gospel. Betsy wrote just to tell me. If Elsie disna write, it'll be her granny's blame. She's a mighty prood woman, an' never forgave her dochter for marryin' Doctor Beatoun.'

'I hear mother stirring up the stair, Miss Ritchie,' said Christian hurriedly, and lifted her knitting and tried to still her trembling lips.

'Ye'll no' speak o'd the noo; I'll tell her quietly mysel'. Mother's no' strong, Miss Ritchie, an' I'm aye feared for her.'

'I'll mind that, Kirsten,' said Miss Ritchie willingly. 'Weel, when's the waddin' to be?'

'Some time in September, after the corn's a' in,' said Christian, so upset by what she had heard that she could answer quite calmly a question which, at any other time, might have embarrassed her. 'Here's mother.'

'Eh, Miss Ritchie, what a stranger!' exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple's pleasant voice; and when Miss Ritchie rose to greet her, she was most painfully struck by the frail appearance of the mistress of Lintlaw. She looked like some fragile blossom which the first breath of a bitter wind would break upon the stalk. Yet she was blithe and cheery as of yore. There never was a shadow on the sweet motherly face, and if there *was* pain, it was borne bravely, and kept hidden from those she loved. Never had she been so unspeakably dear to them all, and in Christian's case there was a strange and fearful clinging of heart to her mother, caused, perhaps, by the thought of the day coming so near when she would need to leave the old home, and by another undefinable feeling which seemed to whisper of even a sorer parting than that.

She sat down beside Miss Ritchie, while Christian went away to see about the tea, and they had a cosy and pleasant gossip about the affairs of the country-side. There is no harm in such gossip; nay, rather, it fosters a kindly interest in our neighbours; it is that malicious talk, prompted by a spirit which would ever attribute the worst motives to another, that is to be avoided as a grievous sin.

'Ye're no' lookin' very stoot, Mrs. Dalrymple,' said Miss Ritchie. 'I doot ye're workin' ower sair.'

'It's no' hard wark, Miss Ritchie, whatever it be,' said the mistress, her pleasant smile a trifle graver than its wont. 'I'm no' weel; I ken mysel' failin'. Whiles, lookin' at the laddies an' thinkin' o' Kirsten's gaun awa', I could sit doon an' greet; but that wadna' mend matters. An' the Lord never empties ae place but He fills anither up.'

Miss Ritchie leaned forward in real concern, but just then the mistress held up a warning forefinger, for Christian's step was heard in the passage, so the subject was changed once more. Just before milking-time that night, when Christian and her mother were taking a little stroll in the garden to see whether any of the blackberries were ready for use, she gently broke to her the substance of Miss Ritchie's news.

Mrs. Dalrymple stood still against the garden dyke, and the little plaid shawl fell from her head, while she looked at Christian with dumbfoundered eyes.

'Oh, Kirsten, woman, this is ill, ill news!' she said, with quivering lip, for her heart was hungering very sore for sweet Elsie, Hew's promised wife.

'Ye believe it to be true, then, mother?' said Christian, a little unsteadily.

'Ower true,' said the mistress, shaking her head. 'An' what's to become o' Hew, Kirsten? He's that set on the bairn, that this 'll tak' a' the pith oot o' him.'

'But she'll come back, mother,' said Christian cheerily; 'she's Hew's promised wife. She's a woman grown now, and naebody daur keep her again her will.'

Yet still the mistress shook her head. 'Lassie, great folks are queer, an' the Traquair wull brooks nae contradiction. Elsie's a gentle crater, an' her spirit'll be easy broken. It was an ill day for Lintlaw an' for Elsie, when Edith Hamilton took her awa' to that ill toon o' Lunnon.'

'I'm vext for Hew, mother,' said Christian absently, for out of her own fulness of content she could sympathize most of all with him.

'Kirsten, bairn, I doot I'll see Elsie nae mair this side o' time,' said Mrs. Dalrymple suddenly; and when Christian looked sharply at her face, it was turned away towards the red glory of the sunset, and there was a strange, far-off look in her wearied eyes which seemed to tell of a soul's deep yearning for its eternal home.

'Mother!' was all that Christian said; then the hands of mother and daughter met in a convulsive grasp, and for Christian the worst was over; for now there need be no suspense, and some day soon there would be a Lintlaw without a mother. Is it not strange, what deep strength comes to us in such moments of keen agony, and how we are lifted out of ourselves, sometimes, up to the very hill of God? Christian knew that her mother was but leaving this world for a better, as Bunyan quaintly has it; and that the home over there was a happier one even than happy Lintlaw.

There was no sleep that night for Mrs. Dalrymple or for Christian. The latter seemed to be only entering now upon the reality of life. It had been unbroken sunshine hitherto, and if the clouds gathered now, dared she repine?

The morning brought a letter to Mrs. Dalrymple, addressed in a strange, cramped handwriting, and bearing an English postmark. Need I say her fingers trembled sorely when she broke the seal, and it was a little time before she could sufficiently compose herself to read it? It ran thus:—

'LYNDON PRIORY, *July* 18, ——

'MADAM,—It is now my duty to inform you of certain circumstances concerning Elsie Beatoun, the young lady whom you have had under your care since the death of her father some years ago. As I am confident that her unhappy mother's history must be already known to you, I need not now trouble you with it. She was my daughter, and Elsie is my grandchild. As such, having met her in London, I at once claimed her. As she has no claim whatsoever upon you, and as anything she has obtained or might obtain from you could only be charity, she naturally makes no objections whatever to accepting the guardianship of one so nearly related to her. But while thus willing, do not for a moment imagine that she or I am ungrateful for your past kindness to her. I feel that it can never be repaid. If you could name any sum of money, or any way in which I could show my appreciation of your kindness to a Traquair, nothing will give me greater pleasure than to comply at once with your desire. I am about to take my grand-daughter abroad for a few months; but towards the end of the year I expect to visit Traquair, and shall do myself the pleasure of again communicating with you, probably in person, regarding what you have done for Miss Beatoun. I am glad to say my dear grand-daughter is in the best of health and spirits, and that she has the companionship of the future Laird of Traquair and his sister to beguile the time. Perhaps I am premature; but believing you to be deeply interested in her future welfare, I may mention that I am in hopes, and not without reason, that I may live to see *her* the Lady of Traquair and Glenshee.

'I am writing with Elsie's knowledge, and she desires her kindly remembrances to those who so befriended her in the past; and she bids me add, that notwithstanding the great change in her position and prospects, she will ever retain a pleasant recollection of her life with you.

'In conclusion, I beg to state that any letter sent to Lady Traquair, at the above address, will be at once forwarded to me. Hoping you will not deny me the satisfaction of showing substantially my gratitude, and again thanking you most sincerely,—I am, madam, your obedient servant,

'ANNE LYNDON TRAQUAIR.'

That was the last news of Elsie which came to Lintlaw for many a day.

CHAPTER XI.

LEAVING THIS WORLD FOR A BETTER.

THERE was a deep, deep, shadow lying on Lintlaw. The house was very still, morning, noon, and night; and when the laddies came home from school at four o'clock, they would lay their books aside very quietly, and take their tea without the usual clamour, not grumbling even though Effie forgot to put sugar or cream in the cups; for when mother was so ill, what did it matter whether they got tea at all? This deep, loving concern for mother had subdued the restless wills into a great gentleness, and Christian marvelled much at the ready, helpful spirit displayed by one and all.

Very gradually the brief afternoon repose had been lengthened out for the mistress of

Lintlaw, till the day came, just in the busiest time of harvest too, when she could not get up at all.

The doctor came from Pathhead, and another from Dalkeith, ay, and a great professor from Edinburgh, at the bidding of Mr. Dalrymple, but even their united skill could not infuse new life into the feeble and wasted energies of the precious sufferer. So, while hoping and praying for the best, they tried to make up their minds for what might come. Only God, who witnesses and pities all the sorrows of humanity, knew what that meant, especially to the elder inmates of Lintlaw. When Mrs. Dalrymple's illness became so serious, all thought or talk of Christian's marriage was, of course, at once laid aside. The providing-making was suspended half-way, and Christian locked it up in a big trunk in the garret, dropping one or two tears upon it as she did so, for none but God knew whether it would ever be finished.

A bountiful harvest was ingathered from Lintlaw and Carlowrie, but there were sore, sore hearts at the stacking that year, and there was no blithe merry-making at the kirn, when the fruits of the earth were safe under 'thack and rope.' They came from far and near to ask for the mistress of Lintlaw, for she was one greatly beloved not only by her own, but by all who had ever come in contact with her. It is one of the mysteries of life that so many of the shining lights are quenched while with them it seemeth yet day, and we cannot find any satisfactory reason for such sudden endings to lives of usefulness and love. It indeed seems at times as if the cumberers of the ground were favoured with a long lease of life; but God, in His mercy, doeth *all* things well.

As Christian was so much with her mother, Effie, light-hearted, rattling, thoughtless Effie, had a grave charge upon her shoulders, and she did her work well, though at times she was not so subservient to Christian as was desirable. The high-spirited, headstrong little girl required skilful as well as firm dealing, and she taxed all her elder sister's energies. Altogether, it was a strange and desolate autumn time for the Dalrymples, and one which even the youngest among them would never forget.

One morning, early in the autumn, while Christian was giving her mother her breakfast, she was disturbed by a dismal wail from Davie, down-stairs. It was just about time for them going off to school, so, having laid her mother back among her pillows, she ran softly down to see what was the matter.

'Wheesht! wheesht! bairns,' she said warningly. 'What's a' the noise aboot?'

'It's Dickie, he's flee'd away,' Robbie hastened to exclaim, while Davie pointed with a chubby forefinger at the empty cage.

'Wha opened the door?' asked Christian sternly, knowing very well it was a trick of Effie's, who loved to see him enjoy his liberty both indoors and out of doors, in the sunshine and the pleasant air.

'It *was* me, Kirsten. It was sic a bonnie mornin', an' Dickie was lookin' that sair oot at the sunshine. He'll come back like he did afore.'

'Mother aye said he wad flee awa' some day, an' no' come back,' said Kirsten. 'When ye kent she didna like us to let him oot, ye shouldna hae dune it, Effie.'

'I'm aye daein' wrang, Kirsten,' said Effie a little sullenly, for her small temper was easily roused. Christian said no more, but went away up-stairs again with a heavy heart, for it had been a treat to mother to have Dickie a little while in her room so long as she could bear his clear, shrill, tuneful notes, and it would be a great grief to her to hear that he was gone. When she awoke in a little time from a slight slumber, she turned to Christian with a questioning look on her face,—

'Are the bairns a' awa', Kirsten?'

'Yes, mother, an' Effie's bakin'. I wish ye could taste her scones the day, just to please her. Ye'd wonder to see how weel the bairn does a'thing.'

'Ay,' said the mistress, with a gleam of the dear motherly smile, 'that's weel, very weel, Kirsten. There's the makin' o' a douce woman in oor madcap Effie yet; but I'm no' hearin' Dickie cheepin' the day. He's unco quate.'

'Ay, mother,' said Christian, and that was all.

'Jist rin doon for him, Kirsten. My heid's no' sair the day, an' I like to see an' hear the crater for Elsie's sake,' she said; then Christian's eyes filled with tears.

'I'm very vexed, mother, but Effie let him oot this mornin', an' he's awa' fleein' like a wild thing ower the Kerse well. Like as no' he'll no' be back till nicht.'

'Jist like Elsie, Kirsten! Lintlaw canna haud him. There's some prayers that canna be answered, Kirsten, this side the grave. At times my heart's perfect wae for a sicht o' Elsie, an' I ken brawly I'll never see her here again.'

Christian was silent, busying herself arranging the medicine-bottles and other things on the drawers-head.

'Come here, Kirsten, my bairn, an' sit doon here,' said Mrs. Dalrymple, with strange earnestness, and Christian obeyed at once, fixing yearning eyes upon the sweet face, now, alas! so worn and thin and sharpened for the approaching change.

'Ye ken, my lamb, that the time is short noo,' she said, with an infinity of tenderness, and when Christian's womanly head went down suddenly upon the pillows, the white thin hand touched it lovingly, and for a little there was no more said.

'Mother, what 'll we *do?*' came at length, almost in a wail, from Christian's lips.

'Dae what mony ither mitherless bairns hae dune afore ye, Kirsten; stick to your father an' to each other; trust in God, and ye'll get warstled through,' was the mother's answer, spoken with the calm of assured faith.

It was long, long since the mistress of Lintlaw had herself faced and overcome the ordeal of parting from all she loved on earth, and now she was able to prepare *them* for that parting also.

'Mother, ye ken brawly I'll no' leave father an' them a',' said Christian by and by.

'At the present time I ken ye winna, my bairn; and though yer hope be deferred a wee, the blessedness o' yer wifehood 'll be a' the sweeter when it comes; but oh, my lassie, what wad I no' gie to haud a bairnie o' yours an' John's in my arms jist ance afore I dee'd!'

'An' oh, mother, how could I take the vows of wifehood or motherhood upon me, an' you no' there to help me?' said Christian brokenly.

'I'll be there in the spirit, my bairn, though ye dinna see me,' said Mrs. Dalrymple, with soothing tenderness. 'An' it is a sweet thought to the parted, baith here and abune, that there 'll be ae family in heaven, an' the bairns 'll ken their grandmother there as weel as here.'

'Mother, hoo can folk that havena the peace of God in their hearts bear sorrow?' asked Christian suddenly. 'What despair an' desolation must be theirs!'

'Ay, bairn, it behoves us to return thanks for the hope that is in us,' said Mrs. Dalrymple; then she dozed a little again, and Christian stole away to superintend things down-stairs.

Mrs. Dalrymple was not always able to talk thus sensibly and cheerfully; there were days of depression and sore pain, days even when the brain was mournfully clouded, and she would cry for 'father' and for Christian, not knowing that they were beside her ministering to her with unutterable tenderness and love. It was then that Christian nearly broke down, for her strength was far spent; but for the manly care and tenderness and devotion of the minister, she could not have borne up at all. So, amid such heart-rendings and painful anxiety, September closed, and October was ushered in by an awful week of storms such as had not been experienced in Scotland for many years. The wind blew a hurricane for days, every leaf was whirled from the autumn-tinted boughs, and in the wood about Lintlaw sturdy oaks and tall pines were torn up by the roots and hurled to the ground with tremendous force. All over the land there was the sound of mourning and woe, because of the destruction the storm had wrought upon the sea. Some fishing villages were deprived of all the bread-winners, and were left only to the widows and the fatherless, the voice of whose mourning went up to heaven. There were not wanting some who pronounced it to be a judgment upon the world, because, like the cities of the plain, it was wholly given up to sin.

Of all this the mistress of Lintlaw was quite unconscious. She now seemed oblivious of everything passing around her. She knew Christian best, and seemed troubled and uneasy when she was a moment from her side.

To Christian it was an unspeakably precious privilege to be able thus to minister to her beloved mother to the very end. Watching closely, noting keenly every change upon the beloved face, she could almost have foretold the very hour of death.

Just before the dawning on a calm, clear, still morning, the summons came. Christian was sitting by herself (her father having gone to lie down for a little), when she saw the change. She hastily ran to summon him and Hew, who had slept at Lintlaw for a week back, just waiting for the end. And these three, standing in breathless silence by that dying bed, saw the gentle passing of the spirit away from the mortal clay. There was no struggle nor pain, nor anything to alarm or distress, only one look of unutterable love, an upward glance, the glimmer of a lovely smile, then the gentle closing of the wearied eyes,—and the red October sun rose upon motherless Lintlaw.

CHAPTER XII.

SACRED HOURS.

THE days which followed were hallowed to all beneath the roof-tree of Lintlaw. Many tears fell, many heart-yearnings swept like the wave of a great sea over the bereft, but a little while spent in the best bedroom where the sleeper lay stilled them all. For *there* was peace, unutterable peace. Mrs. Dalrymple's face had ever been a sweet and pleasant one to look upon, but of late had been drawn and pinched by her weariness and pain. Now all these sad lines were smoothed away, and there lay upon the pillow a face to which the bloom of youth had been restored,—liker the face of sweet Effie Baillie, who thirty years before had come a young and winsome bride to

Lintlaw. Mr. Dalrymple was much in the room, but of his sorrow I cannot write. For thirty years she had been his darling, the mother of his children, the partaker of life's care and joy, his dearest upon the earth; and now she was gone. Not yet did he realize the full extent of this sorrow which had overtaken him. She had been the solace of his sad hours, the smoother away of care; her gentle spirit had softened his harsher moods, had taught him more of that charity which suffereth long and is kind, and he had yet to learn the hardness of life without that blessed influence. He did not say much, nor make any outward display of grief, because to one of his race and nature it was impossible. But beneath there was a tumult of yearning, agonizing pain, which none guessed save Christian. She saw the contraction of the brows, the lines deepening about the mouth, the strange, restless expression in the deep eyes, and prayed with all her soul for her father, knowing that the light of his life had gone out.

After the labours of the day were over, Christian stole up just at the darkening with some sprigs of lavender and bits of white honesty, the only blossoms which had survived the storm, and these she laid upon the pillow, and put a spray in a glass on the dressing-table. While she was thus occupied, the door opened softly, and Davie stole in. The room was full of shadows, and he did not observe Christian at once, for the dressing-table stood at the other side of the room from the bed. He carried in his hand a little machine upon which he had been busily engaged for weeks, for Davie was quite a genius in his way, and had a turn for inventing all sorts of curious things, which were not of much use save that they showed the bent of his mind. If Davie were out of the way, he was sure to be found over at the railway bridge recently erected at Borthwick, watching the passing of the trains, and puzzling his head over the construction and working of the engines, which were more interesting to him than all the live stock on the farm. It was clear that Davie would never follow his father's occupation, but, when the time came, would be likely to turn his attention to engineering. His mother had ever taken a deep and lively interest in his inventions, and as he had only that day brought his beloved little engine to perfection, he had come running to let mother see it, forgetting that the dear eyes had closed for ever on all earthly things.

Christian stood in breathless stillness watching while he climbed up on the chair, and pulled down the cover from his mother's face.

'Mother! mother! open yer een. I've gotten my engine to gang; look at it, mother,' he said piteously; but for the first time in all his little life he found mother deaf to his entreaty. Then Christian saw him stroke her cheek with his black fingers, and, as if chilled by the touch, he broke out into a bitter wail. She came forward, and, lifting him in her arms, tried to comfort him, though her own tears were falling all the while.

'Mother'll no' look at my engine,' he sobbed; but Christian kissed him, and said she would look at it, and help him as best she could. So the little heart was comforted, and by and by he went away quite contentedly down-stairs. Then Christian shut the door, and, kneeling down by the bedside, consecrated herself to the love and service of her father and the rest so long as they needed her. It must not be supposed that it was *no* sacrifice to Christian Dalrymple to give up her own happiness just when it was within her reach. She was just like other women, with the same deep yearning to build up a home for herself, but she was one who would never shirk a duty whatever it might involve for herself. She accepted this cross with a beautiful and pathetic patience, without saying anything about it or grumbling even inwardly that she should be called upon to bear it. That saintly face on the pillow, hallowed by the peace of that heaven whither the spirit had gone, was a noble incentive, a mute guide and beacon-light to all that was lovely and unselfish and truly good.

Christian prayed too with all the earnestness of her heart that she might be helped to fill her mother's place so far as lay in her power, so that the blank might not be so terribly felt in Lintlaw. After these quiet moments she rose refreshed and strengthened, and, bending down, kissed with loving lips the sweet still face lying upon the pillow. Just then there came a low knock to the bedroom door, and Effie's head peeped round it.

'The minister's here, Kirsten,' she said, in a whisper. 'Wull ye come doon?'

'Bid him come up, Effie, please. Tell him I'm in the best room,' whispered Christian back; for she felt that she would be alone with her lover in the first meeting after her bereavement. Mr. Laidlaw had been away at Pencaitland supplying the pulpit of a brother minister, and so had not been at Lintlaw for a few days. Christian stole out after Effie, across the lobby and into the best room, where presently she was joined by Mr. Laidlaw. When she heard him come, she moved to him almost blindly, and buried her face on his breast. She was not often even thus demonstrative, but to-night her heart was overcharged by the sadness of the present, and all the difficulty of the future.

'May God comfort you, my Christian,' said the minister, in low and tender tones. 'It was a great grief to me that I could not be with you when the end came.'

'We were wonderfully sustained; but oh, John, John, how can we live without mother?' Then there came a flood of passionate tears, the first Christian had shed, and they brought healing with them.

'For her it is great gain, my dearest,' said the minister, gently stroking the head bowed upon his breast. That caress so soothed Christian, that before very long she was able to look at him with a smile.

'What good you do me, John!' she said. 'I knew I should be better when you came.'

'I thank God I am so much to you, Christian, for it gives me the hope that when you are my precious wife, I shall be able to smooth away every care and sorrow from your heart,' he said tenderly.

'When I am your wife, John!' repeated Christian wistfully, for her heart was hungering to be his for time and for eternity. 'Oh, John, when can that be now?'

'In a few months' time, my dearest. It would be no disrespect to your mother's angel memory though there should be a quiet wedding at Lintlaw. She in heaven would be glad both with and for us,' said the minister. Then, to his surprise, Christian withdrew herself from his clasp, and stood a little aside, looking at him with a mingling of pathos and resolution on her face.

'John, I promised mother to stay with father for a little while. When you think of all there is to do,—of father and his loneliness, of Effie and the rest, and Davie just a bairn yet,—I'm sure you would not ask me, John, to come for a little while.'

The minister looked at her for a moment in surprise; then he turned and walked away over to the east window, from whence, in the clear, bright moonlight, he could plainly see the roof-tree of the Manse, which even now was being set in order for its mistress. These were bitter moments for the minister of Crichtoun. How could he give her up? how lay aside for an indefinite time all the sweet visions and lovely hopes which had of late so clustered round his home, making its loneliness less hard to bear? These were moments of agony, sharp and keen, also to the heart of Christian Dalrymple. For a little the silence was intense, painful almost beyond endurance. Then with tottering step she crossed the room and gently touched his arm.

'John, speak to me, or I shall die,' she said brokenly.

Then his arms closed about her, and she felt them trembling.

'It was but for a moment, my darling; the bitterness is past. You are a good and noble woman, my Christian, of whom I am not worthy. We will wait with patience, and, please God, our happiness when it comes will be all the sweeter because of the discipline which went before.'

'But, John,' whispered Christian doubtfully, though her heart was filled with a great gladness, 'it may be years. I would not seek to keep you bound to me. I love'—

She said no more, for his hand was on her lips.

'Hush, Christian! In the sight of God you are my wife, and whom He hath joined none may put asunder,' he said solemnly. 'Now, let us go to *her*.'

We will not follow them into the chamber of death; with such solemn and sacred scenes no stranger may intermeddle. When they went down-stairs by and by, Mr. Dalrymple and Hew wondered at the calm and beautiful radiance on Christian's face. The minister stayed a little while, then Hew and Christian walked part of the way with him through the fields. When the brother and sister were coming back together, Hew said suddenly,—

'What a splendid fellow Laidlaw is, Kirsten! I believe he's even guid enough for you.'

Christian laughed softly, and shook her head.

'Far ower guid, Hew; naebody kens what John is but mysel',' she answered, and there was no more said until they paused for a moment on the doorstep at Lintlaw. The moonlight was wondrous clear to-night; far away over the wide sweep of country they could see the dim outline of the Firth, and a little to the right the abrupt peak of North Berwick Law. The air was full of peace; the storm had spent itself, indeed, and left behind a great ineffable calm.

'What changes, Hew!' said Christian. 'Uncle Saunders and Aunt Nannie an' mother a' awa'. D'ye no' feel as if it was a hunder year sin' we gaed thegither to Newlandrigg schule, an' chased Miss Ritchie's peacock up to Scotstoun?'

'Ay, Kirsten, it's whiles a wunner to me hoo I'm to put in the rest o' my days. If it wasna' for leavin' ye a', I wad be off frae Carlowrie,' said Hew, with a ring of pain in his manly voice.

'Hew,' said Christian, 'hae ye lost faith in Elsie?'

'Ay, she's to be mairret, they say, in the simmer to the Laird o' Traquair,' said Hew bitterly. 'She wasna worth an honest love. If I thocht I could be guilty o' sic black ingratitude as hers, I'd fling mysel' in Carlowrie mill-dam, Kirsten.'

'Wheesht! wheesht! Hew,' cried Christian, in distress. 'There's queer whisperins come to me at times, Hew, an' I winna believe that Elsie's false to us a' until I hae better proof. I'm aye prayin', Hew, that God will unravel this knotted thread, an' I believe He wull, because it was one o' mother's last prayers.'

'I doot it'll be ane o' the unanswered petitions, Kirsten; an' though it may be for oor guid, I canna see'd. I wush Elsie Beatoun had never set fit in Lintlaw. She's spoiled my life for me at its ootset,' said Hew, with increased bitterness.

Very gently Christian's hand stole to her brother's tall shoulder, and her true eyes looked with tender sympathy into his face.

'Hew, I'm to learn the meanin' o' hope deferred also,' she whispered; 'an' I ken hoo hard it maun be for you. But dinna lose heart, for as sure as I stand here, Elsie 'll come back, an' she'll be reigning in Lintlaw long afore I be at the Manse. See if my words dinna come true.'

'Ye're a very witch o' Endor, Kirsten,' said Hew, with a glimmer of the old pleasant smile which had been missing from his face for many a day. 'Ye mak' a man believe ye in spite o' his better judgment. I dinna wunner Laidlaw couldna help hissel'. Weel, gin yer words come true, ye shall hae the best silk goon in Dalkeith for the waddin'.'

There was a touch of the old jesting spirit in Hew's words which did Christian's heart good; and so, with an answering smile on her lips, she opened the door and they entered the house. Does it seem strange to you that there could even be the semblance of a jest upon any subject in their minds or on their lips in the very outset of their motherlessness?

Nay, for though the bodily presence was gone, the spirit of the mother would never leave Lintlaw, and it had ever been an enemy to gloom and darkness,—a lover of gentle, harmless mirth, of every sunny and beautiful thing on earth.

After Hew went up to bed, Christian lingered a little beside her father, thinking it would be best to acquaint him at once with the decision to which she and Mr. Laidlaw had come.

'Ye'll be tired, Kirsten?' said Lintlaw, looking with affectionate eyes at his daughter's face.

She had her mother's eyes, and the same unselfish, happy spirit which, for thirty years, had made the sunshine of his home, looked out upon him from these grey depths.

'Not very, father,' answered Christian; then suddenly her eyes filled with tears. 'I just want to tell you to-night that I am not going to the Manse as long as you need me. I promised mother, and John knows, and will wait for me until Effie can fill my place,' she added, gathering strength as she went on, and speaking in quiet and composed tones.

Her father looked at her in surprise. His firm under lip trembled slightly, for he was deeply moved.

'My bairn, I couldna accept sic a sacrifice at your hands an' John's. The Manse is a' ready for ye, an' gang when ye like, ye tak' a father's prayers an' blessin' wi' ye.'

'Oh, but father, I couldna be happy at the Manse thinkin' on you here yersel', an' Effie fechtin' wi', maybe, a strange servant's help to do for you an' the laddies. I'd rather bide; it wad break my heart to see onything gaun wrang in Lintlaw, an' me no' here to help it. Father, in the meantime my duty an' my happiness lies here, the other 'll come by and by.'

The light upon Christian's face as she spoke was beautiful to see. Lintlaw utterly broke down, and covered his face with his hands.

'Kirsten, ye are a rebuke to me. I was but sittin' repinin' afore ye came in, thinkin' o' the ruin and desolation that wad fa' upon Lintlaw when baith yer mither and you were awa'. Wha am I that I should hae been blessed wi' sic a wife and sic a dochter?

Bide, my lassie, bide, and help yer faither to a better knowledge of the love of God. Young as ye are, ye hae mair o' His grace than me.'

Then, for the first time since she was a little toddling bairnie, Christian crept into her father's arms, and laid her arms about his neck. She did not know what boundless good that simple caress did to her father's sore heart, hungering for sympathy and love.

So at the very beginning God blessed Christian Dalrymple's efforts to fill her mother's place, and surely in heaven that mother looked down upon her in approving tenderness and joy.

CHAPTER XIII.

LYNDON PRIORY.

ON a high-backed old-fashioned tapestry-covered chair, in the library at Lyndon Priory, sat Elsie Beatoun on the morning of Christmas day. It was a beautiful morning, clear and bright and bracing, with just sufficient snow on the ground to make the landscape beautiful to look upon. The carollers had been early at the windows of the Priory, and even now the bells of Lyndon were ringing a merry, merry peal, for there should be nothing but joy and goodwill in hearts to-day. But the sweet face of the maiden, sitting alone by the crackling wood fire, was sad to look upon, and there were big tears in the beautiful pathetic eyes. And yet what sorrow or care could touch the loved and cherished grand-daughter of the Lady Anne? Had she not horses and carriages, men servants and women servants, fine raiment and costly jewels, and many other things which are commonly the delight of the feminine mind? Ay, she had all these, but they were not enough. Her heart was breaking for love; her eyes dim with unutterable yearnings for the sight of Scottish faces, the touch of Scottish hands, for one glimpse of that dear home within sight of the green braes of Crichtoun.

The house was very still. The majority of the inmates had gone to attend the Christmas service in the church at Lyndon, only the Lady Anne herself had not yet left her dressing-room. She was failing every day, and those who were skilled in such matters predicted an early death. But though the body had grown feeble, the mind was powerful still; not a jot of its old force and energy was abated, nay, it had increased rather, for in these latter days the Lady Anne brooked not the semblance of contradiction to her will. When the solemn clock in the hall chimed eleven, the library door opened, and the Lady Anne entered the room. She was a gaunt, pale, hollow-eyed spectre now, about whom her trailing robes hung loosely; but the eye was as keen as of yore, and the mouth had lost none of its firmness. She looked deeply surprised to see the slender figure buried in the armchair on the hearth.

'You here, Elsie!' she exclaimed. 'Why are you not at church with the others?'

'I did not care to go this morning, grandmother,' replied Elsie, and rose to offer the old lady her chair. 'Are you well to-day, you look so pale and worn, I fear you have not slept?'

'No, I have not,' said the Lady Anne, sinking wearily into the chair. 'Sleeplessness is one of the many disagreeable attributes of age. And why are you moping alone here? You have been crying, Elsie; I see tears on your eyelashes.'

'Yes, grandmother,' said Elsie simply, and, moving over to the low window, stood looking out upon the whitened landscape, across which came pealing the chime of Lyndon bells.

'Has Deborah Conroy gone to church, Elsie?' asked the Lady Anne harshly.

'Yes, grandmother; I said I would do anything you might require. It is a great pleasure to Deborah to go to church. You will not be angry with her, grandmother? She has not many pleasures in life.'

Elsie meant no disrespect or slur upon her grandmother, she only spoke the simple truth. Deborah Conroy had indeed reason to bless the day that Elsie came to Lyndon Priory, for the young girl, fearless in her innocence and tender sympathy, had stood between her and her kinswoman's wrath times without number. As a natural result, Deborah Conroy worshipped the very ground upon which Elsie trod.

'Does Deborah Conroy complain to you, Elsie? She has little need. I took her from beggary, and clothed and fed her. She sits at my table and eats of my bread. What more does the creature require?'

'How can you speak so, grandmother?' asked Elsie, her delicate face flushing with indignant shame. 'Deborah works hard, and owes you nothing. As for complaining, such a thing is not in her nature, but I should not wonder if she did.'

'You are very bold in your speech, Elsie. You are not afraid to presume on my love for you, said the old woman grimly, yet inwardly not displeased, for she loved to see a fearless spirit displayed in man or woman, and for such as poor Deborah Conroy she had the utmost contempt.

'Grandmother, when are we going to Scotland?' was Elsie's sudden and unexpected question.

'I have not yet decided,' replied the Lady Anne. 'Are you discontented already with my English home? I am sure it is fair enough to satisfy any heart.'

'Yes; but, grandmother, I love Scotland best,' answered Elsie, her soft eyes strangely dim. 'You promised me that we would go at Christmas time, and that I should see them all at Lintlaw.'

'Child! child! are you fretting after these peasant folks yet?' queried the old woman, in tones of querulous displeasure. 'I had thought that so much change of scene and the difference in your life and prospects would have cured you of that. It is not seemly for a Traquair to be so bound up in those so far beneath her.'

Elsie's bosom heaved, her soft eyes now flashed indignant fire.

'You do not know me nor them, grandmother,' she said, in clear, unfaltering tones. 'No punishment would be too great for me were I to forget what they did for me, how they clothed and fed and cherished me, when I was a friendless orphan on the face of the earth. And among all the people I have met, I have seen none to compare with those of whom you so contemptuously speak as peasant folk.'

It was curious to see the varying expressions which crossed the face of the Lady Anne while her grand-daughter was speaking. She was very angry, but she hid it well.

'You flatter me, and those of my friends to whom you have been introduced,' she said slowly. 'Tell me, then, do Howard Traquair and his sister rank as low in your estimation?'

A glimmering of a smile dawned upon Elsie's face.

'Oh no, grandmother, I love both my cousin Howard and Marjorie; I love all beneath the roof-tree of the Priory,' she said. 'But you cannot wonder that my heart clings to my first friends with a deep and yearning love.'

'Come here, Elsie.'

The commanding tones Elsie obeyed at

once, and, kneeling by her grandmother's chair, she looked up questioningly into her face. Oh, what childlike purity and truth, what innocent loveliness was on her face as she did so! In her inmost heart the proud old woman was deeply moved, and she laid one slender hand on the sunny head.

'You love your cousins Howard and Marjorie?' she repeated questioningly.

'Oh yes, grandmother. I could not live without Marjorie, she is such a comfort to me; and Howard is a dear, good boy, though he teases me so dreadfully,' replied Elsie, without the least hesitation.

'You know that Howard is Laird of Traquair and Glenshee?' she said slowly. 'That the summer will see him settled upon his own fair domain, which has not its equal in broad Scotland?'

'Yes, I know,' nodded Elsie, 'and Marjorie will go with him until one or other marry.'

'Howard's wife will have a great position, Elsie,' said the Lady Anne.

'Yes; and oh, I hope he will get one worthy of him, grandmother,' exclaimed Elsie. 'He is so good and noble and kind, he deserves the best woman in the world, I am quite sure.'

'Elsie, there is but one woman in all the world for Howard, and you are the one,' said the Lady Anne bluntly.

Elsie looked at her for a moment with dumbfoundered eyes, then a deep and painful flush overspread her fair face, and she hid it upon the arm of her grandmother's chair.

'Since ever you were providentially restored to me, my child,' began the Lady Anne, with something of gentleness in her tone, 'it has become the dream of my life to see you united to Howard Traquair. Such a union would blot out all the bitter memories of the past, and would atone for what I have suffered these many years. It is a position any young girl might covet, and Howard Traquair is one whom any woman might love. Elsie, Elsie, be good to him and me. I am an unhappy woman, drawing very near the end of what has been a painful life. Give me a gleam of sunshine before the end. Let me see the restoration of the house of Traquair. Let me die knowing that its honour is safe in your hands. I am asking no sacrifice at your hands, my child; nay, rather, I am only asking you to make yourself as well as others happy.'

A convulsive shiver ran through Elsie's frame, but she made no reply, and a long silence ensued. Nothing was to be heard in the quiet room but the ticking of the clock, and from afar the wild, sweet chime of Lyndon bells. At last, with gentle force the Lady Anne lifted the fair head from its resting-place, and looked into Elsie's face. How pale it had grown! how deep and pathetic the shadow dwelling in the big dark eyes!

'Child! child! what is the meaning of this sorrow?' she asked chidingly. 'What is there in the thought of a marriage with Howard Traquair to bring such a shadow to your lips?'

Then Elsie stood up, and, folding her hands before her, looked at her grandmother with a mingling of timidity and resolution on her face.

'It is time now to tell you, grandmother, what I have concealed from you during the six months I have been under your roof-tree,' she said quietly, though her lips trembled. 'I know you will be very angry with me, for a time at least, because your disappointment will be great. Although I do not love

Howard Traquair as a woman must love the man to whom she gives herself, there is another reason which would prevent me entertaining the idea of marrying him for a moment. I—I am not free, grandmother. I left Lintlaw in the spring as the promised wife of Hew Dalrymple, and though he has never answered my letters, I will be true to him. I—I could not wed another, grandmother, while my heart is so wholly his.'

The Lady Anne rose, and the passion on her face was awful to see. Elsie looked upon her in affright. She spoke no word, but began to move slowly towards the door. Then Elsie sprang to her side.

'Grandmother, do not look at me with these eyes,' she cried almost wildly. 'Be kind, be merciful to me. If you can never forgive me, give me money to take me away from Lyndon. Let me go back to Scotland to those who have loved and cared for me longest and best. I am not ungrateful, grandmother, and I will always love you; but oh, my heart is breaking for home!'

The Lady Anne cast off the pleading hand. Her white lips essayed to utter the words upon them, but failed. But the eyes seemed to slay Elsie where she stood. She was glad to press her hands to her own to shut out that look.

'Wicked, ungrateful girl!' came at length passionately from the Lady Anne's lips. 'Child of a perverse mother, would to God I had left you to your low-born friends and your peasant lover!'

Then she tottered from the room, and up-stairs to her own, to brood anew over the downfall of the hopes which had blossomed anew over Elsie. Ay, that was a bitter, bitter hour indeed for Anne Lyndon Traquair.

Elsie stood for a few minutes after her grandmother left her, then turning, threw herself upon a couch, and buried her face in the pillow. The same bitter pain her mother had so often endured was hers to-day. She lay there stunned, unable to weep, scarcely to think, until the sound of merry voices in the hall proclaimed the return of the church-goers. Then Elsie rose, but before she could escape, the door opened, and Howard entered the room. A smile was on his face, bantering words on his lips, but at sight of his cousin's face he stopped short, looking at her blankly.

'Why, Elsie, what is it? Who has been annoying or vexing you?' he asked, with real concern in his pleasant voice.

'Nobody. I have vexed grandmother. Don't ask me any questions, please, Howard,' said Elsie pitifully; then, seeing in his face confirmation of her grandmother's words, her face flushed once more.

'If you had said Aunt Anne had vexed you, I would believe it more readily,' he said quickly. 'Can't I help you, Elsie? You know there is nothing on earth gives me greater pleasure than to serve you.'

'No, thank you, dear Howard. I am not ungrateful, but nobody except God can help me in this trouble. Is Marjorie up-stairs? I—I think I will go to her.'

So saying, Elsie stole softly from the room, leaving Howard both perplexed and sorely troubled. With weak and weary feet, Elsie climbed the wide staircase, and entered the dressing-room she shared with Marjorie. Howard Traquair's sister was the counterpart of himself, gay, light-hearted, happy souled, full of lively humour and true loving-kindness, a sunbeam of peace and beauty wherever she went. She had accepted the great change in her fortunes with the same serene contentment with which she had borne poverty. Riches cannot spoil such wholesome natures as these which have been trained and purified in the fine school of hardship and self-denial. She was standing at the mirror unfastening her fur cloak, but at Elsie's entrance turned a rosy and winsome face all smiles to greet her.

'Why, Elsie, dear, what has happened to you? Who has been annoying my pet?' she cried, with the impulsive and caressing ways peculiar to her. Her voice was very musical, and had an English accent which contrasted oddly with Elsie's Scottish tongue.

'Oh, Marjorie, Marjorie, my heart is very sore!' cried Elsie, and in a moment her head was pillowed on Marjorie's faithful breast. 'Just let me lie here where I feel so safe. Oh, dear Marjorie, I have nobody now on earth but you and Howard, for grandmother will never forgive me.'

Then a flood of tears came to relieve the overcharged heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS RITCHIE'S COUSIN BETSY.

IMMEDIATELY upon her return from church, Deborah Conroy was summoned to the presence of the Lady Anne. She found her sitting by her dressing-room fire, her face deadly pale, and wearing an expression which Deborah knew well enough to dread. Her kinswoman was in one of her worst moods to-day.

'I—I hope you were not vexed because I went to church, Anne?' she said falteringly. 'Elsie said she would see whether you wanted anything while I was away.'

'I cannot ask Elsie to perform your duties, Deborah Conroy,' said her ladyship harshly. 'But I will let it pass. I shall not be able to come down-stairs to-day, I am so feeble and far spent. The vicar and his wife dine with us to-day, but my grand-daughter will convey my apologies to them, and you will see that everything is provided for their comfort.'

'Yes, Anne, I ordered the dinner before I went away, and I am sure it will be very nice,' murmured Deborah, nervously working with the fringes of her shawl.

It was pitiful to see the shrinking of the poor creature in the presence of her austere relative, of whom she stood in awe amounting to fear.

'You will bring me some writing materials up here. I have some correspondence to attend to; and when the letter-bag is ready for despatch to Lyndon you will bring it up here to me, and I will put in my letters and lock it myself.'

'Very well, Anne,' said Deborah Conroy, too unsuspicious to think there was anything peculiar in such a request.

'That is all; but stay, go and see where Elsie is, and come and tell me;' and Deborah, glad to escape, hastened to obey.

On her way down-stairs she met Marjorie, and paused to ask where Elsie was.

'She is lying down, Deborah. She has a bad headache, and I promised that no one should disturb her. If Aunt Anne is asking for her, tell her she has fallen asleep.'

That message Deborah at once carried to the Lady Anne, and then, having brought the writing materials, was dismissed from her presence.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the letter-bag was laid upon the hall table, ready for the groom to take to the post-office at Lyndon.

While Elsie and Marjorie were having a cup of tea together in their dressing-room, Deborah Conroy, unobserved, removed the bag and carried it up to the Lady Anne. She had finished writing her letters, and requested Deborah to send up tea for her in a quarter of an hour. When she was again left alone the Lady Anne unlocked the bag and lifted out the letters, of which there was a goodly number, for the servants were allowed to send their letters in the Priory bag, and it being Christmas, were exchanging greetings with their friends. Very deliberately the Lady Anne lifted them out one by one There were several in Howard's bold, beautiful handwriting, and one in Marjorie's flowing hand, addressed to a friend in London. At length a gleam of satisfaction crossed the face of the Lady Anne, for she had found the one she sought, an envelope addressed in Elsie's handwriting, to Mrs. Dalrymple, Lintlaw, Gorebridge, Scotland. Without hesitation the Lady Anne broke the seal, tossed the envelope in the fire, and, smoothing out the neatly-folded sheet, read what was written thereon. Dark, dark grew her brow as she perused the passionate epistle, every line of which breathed a yearning and unaltered love. It prayed for but a line in return, to ease the agony of suspense and pain which she was suffering. It begged them not to forget her yet awhile; and closed with an assurance that, please God, she would come again some day soon to make her home with them for all time; to be the Elsie of old, loved and cared for far beyond what she deserved. There were many inquiries about every separate member of the family, and only one brief allusion to Hew. 'Tell Hew, dear Aunt Effie,' ran the trembling words, and just then a big tear-drop had fallen and made a blot upon the page, 'that even in the midst of a silence which my aching heart cannot understand, I am and will be true to him still.'

Even in her anger one thing struck the Lady Anne, and awakened in her heart something akin to remorse. Although her name was several times mentioned, it was always in terms of gratitude and love; there was not even the most distant allusion to her harsher moods, or to what had passed that very morning. She was repaying that unselfishness with a treachery black and bitter; and though she had the child's welfare as well as her own ambition at heart, she had forgotten those warning words of Holy Writ—'Ye may not do evil that good may come.'

Having read and re-read the letter, she threw it into the dancing flames and watched it disappear; then she turned to replace the letters in the bag, when her eye was riveted by another address, evidently written by one of the servants:—

'Miss Ritchie,
'Scotstoun, Gorebridge,
'Scotland.'

Reading that, a sudden inspiration flashed across the mind of the Lady Anne, and she foresaw an easy and speedy ending to the difficulties which beset her, and which, once removed, would surely secure her the desire of her heart.

Punctually at the hour, Deborah Conroy herself brought up the tea tray, and found her kinswoman leaning back in her chair, apparently asleep. The letter-bag, safely locked, lay on the table beside her.

'Is that you, Deborah?' asked she languidly. 'Take down the letter-bag and send Barrett off with it at once. My letters are in. How does the dinner progress? Is Elizabeth Ritchie very busy?'

'Yes, Anne; but I believe she will be nearly through now,' said Deborah, somewhat astonished at the question, for it was very seldom that the Lady Anne expressed much interest in household matters, though she was quick enough to blame when any hitch occurred.

'Elizabeth is a good cook and a faithful servant, is she not, Deborah? How long has she been with us now?'

'Seven years, Anne. Yes, she is a good servant, but I do not like her. She is so quiet and cunning,' said Deborah simply.

'You judge harshly, Deborah,' said the Lady Anne severely. 'She is a Scotchwoman, remember, and that reticence and stillness which you call cunning is only a mark of her nationality. I was thinking to make each of the servants a little Christmas gift, Deborah, because since last Christmas so many happy changes have befallen me. I would seek to mark in some way my gratitude for the restoration both of my beloved grandchild, and of my nephew the Laird of Traquair. I will begin under my own roof-tree. You shall have twenty pounds, Deborah, and that amethyst brooch of mine for which you have such an admiration. Next week, if my health is a little improved, we will make arrangements for giving the poor people of Lyndon and Amhurst a substantial dinner and tea; and we will have a party here on New Year's Eve. Young people must have some enjoyment, Deborah. The quiet life which satisfied two old women will not do for the new members of our family.

Deborah Conroy looked upon her kinswoman in surprise, mingled with a little anxious fear. She could scarcely believe that in a sane moment the Lady Anne would utter such sentiments as these. The ghost of a smile touched for a moment the pale lips of the Lady Anne.

'Why do you look at me so? I am in earnest, Deborah,' she said. 'Now, leave me, and tell Elizabeth Ritchie that when she is at liberty I shall be glad to see her here for a few minutes.'

'Very well, Anne,' replied Deborah Conroy, and retired to ponder in solitude over this strange new whim of the Lady Anne. In about half an hour, Elizabeth, or Betsy Ritchie, as she was commonly called, came to her mistress's chamber door, and was at once requested to come in.

She was a tall, pale, dark-browed woman, with strongly-marked features and piercing black eyes, which, with their furtive gleam and the peculiar droop of the lids, gave evidence that there was some truth in Deborah Conroy's prejudice against her. She was a daughter of Adam Ritchie of

Windymains, who had been a son of one of the Faas of Yetholm, so there was gipsy blood in Betsy's veins. She was not well liked by her neighbour servants, who were mostly flighty English girls, as different from her as could well be imagined. She kept herself to herself, as the saying goes, and was proud in her consciousness of being an invaluable servant, who could command her labour's worth anywhere.

When she entered the room the Lady Anne looked at her keenly, as if to judge whether she could trust her. Then she motioned her to a chair.

'Sit down, Elizabeth. Miss Conroy would tell you, probably, why I sent for you?'

'No, my lady,' said Betsy, who, when speaking to her mistress, laid aside her own tongue. 'I hope you have no fault to find with me?'

There was an aggressive note in Betsy's voice which told that she was prepared to resent any rebuke.

'Oh no, Elizabeth; you are, and have ever been, a faithful friend and servant to me since you came to Lyndon. I would seek now to mark my appreciation of these services by a small gift,' said the Lady Anne, and, unlocking a small desk on the table beside her, took from thence five golden sovereigns, and counted them into Betsy's palm. A slight flush of surprise and pleasure tinged for a moment the woman's pale cheek, for she had all a gipsy's greed of gold; yet, unlike these wandering people, she hoarded up every penny, scarcely expending what was necessary on clothing for herself.

'Thank you, my lady,' she said, dropping a profound courtesy, and slipping the sovereigns into her pocket.

'How long is it since you were in Scotland, Elizabeth?'

'It is eleven years, my lady, since I came to London as cook in the family of Mrs. Graham of Meggatlee. I left them there, and took service with the Bishop of Raylands, whom I left seven years come Whitsuntide to come here,' replied Elizabeth quietly.

'And you have never been home to your own people since then?'

'Never, my lady. My old home is broken up. My father and mother died in Windymains, and my brother Adam has the farm now. He's married now, but I keep up no correspondence with him or his wife; we never could agree,' said Betsy, unconsciously beguiled to tell more of her history than had passed her lips for many years.

'It seems a strange and lonely kind of thing for you to be cut off from all your kindred, Elizabeth,' said the Lady Anne. 'You have been a good and faithful servant to me. I would not grudge you a holiday, if you wish it, to revisit Scotland.'

Very great was the surprise on the face of Elizabeth Ritchie at that moment.

'You are very kind, my lady. But I have no great desire to go back to Scotland. The only person I would like to see there would be my cousin Ailie Ritchie at Scotstoun.'

'Scotstoun! Where is that, Elizabeth?'

'It is a farm place near the village of Gorebridge, my lady, quite near to Lintlaw, where Miss Elsie lived so long.'

'Ah, then, did you know the Dalrymples of Lintlaw?'

'Yes, my lady; but they were proud people, with whom I never could get on. But my cousin Ailie made a great work with them.'

'Do you ever hear from this cousin of yours, Elizabeth?' queried the Lady Anne.

It was a great effort for her to stoop thus to question a dependent, but great events might hang on the issue of this interview.

'Sometimes, my lady,' was all Elizabeth replied, for she would not volunteer much information unasked.

'In her letters to you does she ever make any allusion to my grand-daughter or the people of Lintlaw?'

'Yes, my lady; Ailie often speaks of them.'

'Probably she has alluded to some love affair which at one time existed between my grand-daughter and the son of the house?'

'Yes, my lady. In her last letter to me, written about four months ago, my lady, she said that Hew Dalrymple was not the same man since Miss Elsie went away, and that she was sore missed at Lintlaw.'

The Lady Anne remained silent for a brief moment, shading her face with her hand. Then suddenly she raised her head and looked the woman full in the face.

'Elizabeth, can I trust you as a friend to me and the house of Traquair? I am in a sore difficulty, out of which you can help me if you will.'

'I shall be honoured by your ladyship's confidence. You know I am not one of these babbling fools who can keep nothing. I can be as secret as the grave,' replied Betsy quietly but respectfully.

'Then, Elizabeth, listen to me,' said the Lady Anne, leaning forward in her eagerness. 'You can see—any one can see—the devotion of the Laird of Traquair to my grand-daughter. Such an alliance would bring happiness to all concerned, and would make the building up of the house of Traquair. My grand-daughter returns the love of the Laird, but in the meantime she foolishly considers herself bound to this young farmer in Scotland. This foolish idea is the only barrier to her happiness, and is making the child miserable. If by any means she could hear that this Dalrymple was about to marry or was married to another, her scruples would vanish. He has evidently forgotten her, seeing he has not written to her once since she came to me. You follow me, Elizabeth?'

'Yes, my lady,' replied Betsy Ritchie, with a peculiar droop of the eyelids. 'I understand you quite well.'

'If you could go to Scotland and bring back word to me of Hew Dalrymple's marriage, I could break it to her, referring her to you for confirmation. It would be a harmless deception, Elizabeth, seeing the young man has already proved faithless.'

'Would a letter purporting to come from my cousin at Scotstoun not do as well, my lady?' said Betsy meaningly. 'I have no desire to go to Scotland at the present time.'

'Yes, Elizabeth, it will do quite as well. You understand, I see, and are willing to aid me in securing the happiness of those so dear to me,' said the Lady Anne, with effusion. 'In consideration of your help, I shall give you fifty pounds upon New Year's day, Elizabeth, and fifty more upon the marriage of the Laird and my grand-daughter. You will not find a Traquair an ungrateful recipient of kindness, Elizabeth.'

'Thank you, my lady; I am sure of that,' said Betsy Ritchie, in well-pleased tones.

'May I go now, my lady? I fear the dinner requires my attention.'

The Lady Anne bowed, and her servant withdrew. She was well satisfied with the result of the interview, and congratulated herself upon having so deceived Elizabeth Ritchie as to make her request seem a small and trifling thing. But, clever though she was, the Lady Anne was no match for Adam Ritchie's daughter, in whose veins ran the cunning blood of the Faas.

Late in the evening, just before the vicar and his wife arrived at the Priory, the Lady Anne rang for Deborah Conroy, and bade her send Elsie, when she was dressed, into her chamber. Elsie came at once, a fair, sweet, pure vision in flowing white, with no ornament but some natural blossoms nestling at her bosom. She was very pale and trembling, for the day had been long and trying for her. She looked timidly at her grandmother's face, and, seeing a kind smile there, stole over to her chair, and knelt down beside it.

'My child, my darling, I was very rough with you this morning,' said the Lady Anne, with the utmost gentleness. 'I am a passionate, cross old woman, who even in age has not learned that life is full of disappointments. I would not break your heart, my Elsie, only do not leave me for a little while. Stay by me till the end. I shall not see the year out, and then you can go back to the friends you love so well.'

Elsie burst into tears. The relief was so great that she was unable to bear it. By and by, growing calmer, she rose, and, folding her soft arms about her grandmother's neck, pressed her pure lips to the furrowed brow.

'Stand back a little, my child, till I look at you,' she said a little hurriedly, for that kiss stabbed her selfish heart to the core. 'You look fair and sweet, Elsie, but you must have some other ornament than these flowers.'

'I like flowers best, grandmother. I have mamma's necklace, you know, but I did not put it on,' said Elsie gently.

'I have something for you, my child, which you must wear to-night in token of forgiveness. Unlock the wardrobe and fetch me my large jewel-case from the lower shelf.'

Elsie obeyed, and stood by while her grandmother opened the case. From thence she took a necklace of turquoise as blue as the forget-me-not, set in gold, of rare and costly workmanship.

'That was one of my wedding gifts, given me by my aunt the Countess of Lyndon. Put it on,' she said; and then, lifting out the upper tray, revealed to Elsie's gaze a sparkling array of diamonds, showing in exquisite relief against the rich purple velvet upon which they lay. 'I had hoped these also would be yours. They are destined for Howard's wife,' said the Lady Anne, introducing an admirable ring of regret in her voice. 'But never mind, I know your heart is not set upon such baubles. Now, put past the case, and run down-stairs to be in readiness for the guests.'

Elsie obeyed, and flew down-stairs singing, for the nightmare which oppressed her heart had fled, and the sun shone again.

It would all come right in the end, oh yes, she told herself. In her softer moods her grandmother would grant her anything, and before the summer came, her happy feet would once more cross the threshold of dear Lintlaw.

CHAPTER XV.

BLIGHTED HOPE.

'WHERE is Elsie, Marjorie?' asked Howard Traquair, coming into the drawing-room at Lyndon one lovely afternoon in the early summer.

'I think she is in the conservatory, Howard. What do you want with her?'

'To speak to her, of course. I can't leave my good-bye till the last minute. I won't likely see her again for long enough. Aunt Anne speaks of coming to Traquair in the autumn, but when I looked at her to-day, I thought the chances were against it.'

Marjorie rose from her seat in the low window where she had been resting, after the bustle of packing for the Scotch journey she was to begin that evening. The brother and sister had lingered long at Lyndon, loving it for Elsie's sake more than for its own, but now they were going to make their home in Scotland. The brief visits Howard had paid to the goodly heritage which was now all his own, had convinced him that his presence there was greatly needed. But the Lady Anne had been loth to let them go, and Howard did not suspect the chief cause of that reluctance.

'Howard,' said Marjorie, laying a gentle hand on her brother's arm, 'don't say anything to Elsie yet. I *know* she will not listen to you. She has never told me, but I am afraid her heart is left behind in Scotland. I tell you this to save you needless pain.'

Howard bit his lip, and slightly turned away. Well, it was not a pleasant piece of news.

'I'll try my luck, any way, Marjorie,' he said; 'I can but fail, and Elsie will be honest with me, I know.'

So off he went, hoping yet fearing, to the conservatory which opened off the dining-room of the Priory. Elsie was not there, but through the windows he caught a glimpse of a figure in sober grey, walking with listless steps among the elms in the park. In a few seconds he was striding across the turf towards her. She heard his step, and came to meet him, with a frank, sweet, yet somewhat mournful smile on her lips.

'I left Marjorie resting, Howard, and came out for a breath of air. Is it not pleasant out of doors to-day?'

'Very; and that is a fair picture,' said Howard, pointing to the wide acres of meadowland which stretched in undulating waves away across to the low range of hills in the far distance.

It was truly a pleasant view, suggestive of peace and plenty and quiet loveliness. But that day Elsie's eyes, longing for the green vales and rugged heather hills of her native land, could see no beauty in an English landscape.

'I was not thinking about it, Howard. I am very sad and miserable,' she replied listlessly. 'What do you suppose will become of me after Marjorie and you are away?'

'You will miss us, then, Elsie?' asked Howard bluntly, and his eyes were dangerously eloquent, only Elsie's face was turned away, and she did not even take heed of his words. Her heart was filled with one unutterable, passionate yearning to travel with them to Scotland,—to breathe the air of the land she loved, to tread its soil, and, last and best of all, to see face to face once more the dear ones at Lintlaw. Oh, but all the waywardness of past years, the foolish yearnings for an idle and luxurious life, were bitterly punished to-day!

'Aunt Anne has promised to bring you to Traquair in the autumn, Elsie,' said Howard, with a gentleness which was beautiful in its manliness. 'You *will* come to Marjorie and me, dear? we will be hungering for you.'

'Yes, Howard, I will come if grandmother will let me,' she said; and, turning her head, lifted her eyes full of tears to his face. 'Forgive me crying, Howard. I am only a poor, weak girl, and I feel so helpless alone here, and life seems so hard just at present; and oh, I *am* grateful to Marjorie and you for all your love and kindness to me!'

That look, these pathetic words, cast Howard Traquair's prudence to the winds.

He bent forward, and the eyes looking into Elsie's so overflowed with passionate love that hers fell.

'Elsie, Elsie, come with us now! I can give you a sweeter, happier life than this. You will do just as you will. I love you, Marjorie loves you. Come with us!' he said eagerly. 'I want you for my wife, Elsie; I love you beyond anything on earth.'

Elsie trembled from head to foot, and covered her blushing face with her hands. Oh! why was life so hard? why was it that she must be unkind to those she loved, and stab truest friends to the heart?

'Howard, Howard, hush, oh hush, my heart will break!' she said, in low and broken tones, and, leaning against the tree beside her, she burst into tears.

It cost Howard Traquair a mighty effort to restrain the impulse prompting him to clasp the drooping figure in his strong arms, to shelter her from every breath of sorrow or care. But he dared not, for her trembling words had rung the death-knell of his hopes.

'Elsie, forgive me if I have pained you,' he said humbly and earnestly. 'I did not mean it. I could not help myself, I loved you so.'

Then Elsie raised her head and looked at him again with steadfast, mournful eyes.

'I would give the world almost, Howard, if I could have said yes to what you ask me,' she said quite quietly. 'I love you so well, as a sister might, dear Howard, that I will tell you what I have never told a soul on earth but grandmother, that my heart is not mine to give. I gave it away, Howard; and though I believe mine will never be a happy love, I cannot bring it back. I think those born in Scotland are leal aye to their first love.'

Howard Traquair turned away for a moment. The struggle was sharp but brief. When Elsie saw his face again it wore an expression of sympathy, of tender compassion, beautiful to see.

'God help and strengthen you, dear Elsie,' he said, with a great gentleness. 'I love you so well that it will be my hope and prayer that happiness may yet be yours, if he is worthy.'

Then he went away, and Elsie saw him no

more, until, just in the last bustle of parting, he took her hand in a grip of iron, and looked straight into her face, his true eyes dim with a feeling which could find no expression in words. Never had he seemed so noble, so manly, so altogether worthy of a woman's love. Never had Elsie so honoured him, so loved him, as she did at that moment. She bent her head over his hand and lightly touched it with her lips. When he got out of doors he saw that she had left a tear upon it. Poor Howard! Poor Elsie! Very ravelled is the skein of life!

That evening the Lady Anne Traquair came down to the drawing-room for the first time for many weeks. She was carefully and elegantly dressed, but the rich black silk hung loosely on her wasted frame, and the fine lace ruffles about her throat seemed to show more plainly the painful thinness and the ghastly pallor of her face. She found in the drawing-room, as she expected, her grand-daughter and Deborah Conroy. The latter was at her usual work,—these hands dared know no idleness,—but Elsie was lying back on a low chair, with her eyes closed and her hands idly folded on her lap. The Lady Anne entered softly and stood looking for a little time upon the unconscious face of her grand-daughter. These weary months of suspense and heart-sickness had told, and very sorely, on Elsie Beatoun. The rounded cheek was sharpened, the eyes looked out from shadowy hollows, while the sweet lids had a pitiful droop in them sadder than tears.

It was early summer now, as I said, and still there had come no answer to Elsie's letters, and of late there had crept into the girl's mind a feeling of bitterness akin to anger against those who had treated her with so much coldness and neglect. She had done nothing to merit such treatment, for it was not of her free will that she had come to Lyndon, and in her letters she never failed to repeat that when she reached the age of one-and-twenty no power on earth should keep her away from Lintlaw, and from the fulfilling of her plighted troth. All these assurances, as well as the passionate, loving pleadings which accompanied them, had been passed over with an unbroken silence which seemed to mean contempt. They had never loved her as she loved them; ah, no! else they never could have forgotten her so soon.

Never, even in her hours of darkest doubt and bewilderment and pain, did a suspicion of treachery enter the mind of Elsie Beatoun. She was herself pure and high-souled and open as the day, and, moreover, had been all her life long accustomed to good, honest, upright folks, therefore she was the more easily deceived in her grandmother. She was grateful for her considerate kindness during that weary time, doubly so for her silence regarding Hew Dalrymple, and she showed that gratitude in a thousand nameless and endearing ways, which might have moved the stoniest heart. But the Lady Anne, though sometimes touched, steeled herself against her better impulses, and fixed her mind unalterably on the end she had in view. Would she live to see her dream fulfilled, or would death cut her off in the midst of her scheming and plotting before she saw the building up of Traquair? That question rose up ceaselessly before the Lady Anne's mind, especially in the silent night watches when she was alone with her own thoughts. Watching her grand-daughter keenly, noting the gradual paling of the delicate cheek, the fading of the lustre from the bright eyes, she decided that it was time now to pluck up the loosely-rooted hope which she was well aware still lingered in the girl's heart.

With her usual nervous solicitude for her kinswoman's comfort, Deborah Conroy rose to place for her a chair near the hearth (for though it was May there were fires in the Priory rooms still), and Elsie opened her eyes.

'Oh, grandmother, have you come down?' she asked, in surprise. 'Do you feel much better?'

'I am at least no worse,' replied the Lady Anne. 'Deborah, leave us for a little; I would speak with my grand-daughter.'

Deborah obeyed, nothing loth; she was infinitely more at ease out of her kinswoman's presence than in it.

Then the Lady Anne sat down very close to the fire, for she was always chilly now, and looked with keen eyes into the sweet, pale face of the girl before her. Oh, how like she was to the fair young mother she had so early lost! Looking at her the Lady Anne's heart was stirred by a thousand memories of the past. She could almost have forgotten the lapse of years, and think it was her own daughter sitting beside her, as she had been used to do, before the sorrow fell upon Traquair. To banish these memories, as well as any emotion which naturally accompanied them, the Lady Anne broke the silence.

'The house seems strange and desolate to-night. Doubtless you sorely miss Howard and Marjorie,' she said. 'We never know how we love until those dear to us are parted from us.'

It was an injudicious speech, for it was the very echo of every feeling in Elsie's heart. Her lip quivered, and her hand stole up to her eyes, as if to hide what was revealed in them. With failing bodily strength, Elsie's power of self-control was failing also; she was more easily moved to tears, more easily hurt than of yore; her sensitiveness in every point had greatly increased.

'You will greatly miss them, Elsie?' pursued the Lady Anne, in a questioning tone.

'Of course I will, grandmother,' Elsie answered her. 'It would be strange if we did not all miss Howard and Marjorie.'

'If I mistake not, the Laird of Traquair was loth to leave Lyndon, even for his own heritage,' said the Lady Anne. 'My child, I have never broached the subject since that unpleasant Christmas morning. Am I seeking too much if I ask you to tell me whether Howard has not himself confirmed what I said regarding his sentiments towards you?'

'You have a perfect right to know, grandmother, and I would have told you sooner or later,' said Elsie, with listless tranquillity. 'Howard asked me to-day to be his wife.'

'And you — you — did not altogether refuse?' said the Lady Anne, with an eagerness painful to behold.

'I did, grandmother, and I told him why. Howard and I understand each other. He knows that I love him as dearly as I could a brother of my own, and that is all.'

The Lady Anne shaded her face with her hand now, to hide the angry gleam in her proud eyes. She must labour to hide her real feelings, else all chance of success would be gone.

Thinking her grandmother was once more sorely displeased with her, Elsie rose and knelt down by her chair, laying her hand lightly on her arm.

'Grandmother, look at me. Don't be angry with me, dear grandmother; I am so unhappy,' she pleaded. 'And I want to ask something from you, grandmother, only I am afraid.'

'Ask, and if within my power, and I think it for your good, I will not refuse,' said the Lady Anne, striving to speak not only calmly but with kindness.

'It is this, grandmother,' said Elsie, and her beautiful eyes were wide and pathetic in their pleading, 'that you will give me some money, and let me go away to Scotland to see for myself whether they have forgotten me. It would satisfy me, dear grandmother, and I would come back to you content, and devote the rest of my life to you. Oh, grandmother! don't refuse; let me go, for I cannot bear this heart-agony much longer.'

There was a brief silence. Then the Lady Anne looked full into the pleading upraised face with a well-assumed expression of sorrow on her own.

'My child, my poor, foolish, trusting child,' she said, 'I dare not keep the truth from you any longer. You will try to bear it with becoming fortitude.'

'Bear what, grandmother? what truth is it? Are they all dead at Lintlaw?' asked Elsie, wildly starting up.

'Be calm, my child. Kneel down again beside me, and be calm, else I cannot tell you,' said the Lady Anne firmly. Elsie at once obeyed, but she was trembling from head to foot. 'You know my cook, Elizabeth Ritchie, has relations at a farm in Scotland quite near to your Lintlaw,' said the Lady Anne, with slow emphasis.

'Has she? No, I did not know. Oh, grandmother, is it possible that the Ritchies of Scotstoun are her friends?' exclaimed Elsie, who never had heard of Miss Ritchie's cousin Betsy in her life.

'That is the name; such a peculiar one, I always thought,' said the Lady Anne musingly. 'Well, Elsie, she has some correspondence with them, and I, knowing that probably they might sometimes mention *your* friends, asked her some time ago if she knew anything of the Dalrymples, so that, if possible, I might ease your suspense, my darling.'

'Yes, grandmother,' said Elsie, in a strained, intense voice.

'My child, how can I tell you? It is as I thought. They were never worthy of your love; for this Hew Dalrymple is to be married this summer to a young girl; her name, if I remember rightly, is Katie Gray; she lives at a farm quite near to Scotstoun. Am I right?'

'Yes, yes; Katie Gray, at Southside. I know her,' said Elsie, in a voiceless whisper.

'I kept it from you, my child, as long as I could. But I could no longer endure to see you fretting after a faithless lover, you who could mate, if you willed, with the highest in the land. If you wish to hear any further particulars, ask Elizabeth; she will give you them, or show you her cousin's letter, which she gave to me to read. Why, my child, what is it? You promised to be calm.'

'Yes, yes, I will be, grandmother,' said Elsie, rising with trembling limbs. 'Let me go away up-stairs, grandmother, just to be alone for a little.'

So saying, she walked unsteadily from the room, and toiled up the staircase to her own chamber. When she entered she shut the door, and then a great dead stillness seemed to settle down upon Lyndon Priory.

Just at the darkening, when the Lady Anne was about to leave the drawing-room, Elsie glided into the room. The Lady Anne could have cried out at the change these hours had wrought upon the girl's sweet face. It was no puny grief which had ploughed these deep pain-lines upon the low, white brow, no imaginary sorrow which had drawn the lips, and cast that deep, dark shadow in the beautiful eyes. Nay, it was the agony of blighted hope, wounded pride, maidenly shame, the blackness of desolation and despair. Her voice when she spoke was calm and quiet, but the sweetest note of its music was gone.

'It is over, grandmother,' she said. 'Henceforth I am yours. I will devote myself to you, for your love will not fail me. And when the time comes, I pray God—and I think He will answer my prayer—that He will take us together to Himself.'

Then, as if to seal her vow, she laid one arm about the neck of her grandmother, and, lifting her head, kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRAQUAIR.

JUST at the sunset hour, on the evening of the third day after their departure from Lyndon, Howard Traquair and his sister arrived at Traquair. There was no railway within thirty miles of their home, but a carriage had been awaiting them at the station when they left the train. Their drive lay through some of the most magnificent scenery of the Highlands, and Marjorie, unaccustomed to the wild and awful grandeur of the mountain passes, and the deep but lovely valleys, was awed into utter silence. Howard, who had seen it several times before, was not so much absorbed in its contemplation, his mind being occupied chiefly with thoughts of Elsie. So there was little conversation between them while the fleet horses carried them over the rocky roads to their future home.

The day and hour of their arrival had, in accordance with Howard's express desire, been kept secret, so that when they swept through the picturesque village of Traquair, there was no demonstration of any kind. But the carriage, and the Laird himself, were recognised, and the news of their arrival quickly spread.

Just when the red glory of a magnificent sunset was tinging hill and dale and wild moorland with its wondrous light, the carriage swept through the stone gateway into the policies of Traquair, and up an avenue of spreading birch and elm to the house.

It was a wild, lovely, picturesque spot. The house was of massive and stately proportions, but it was the architecture of a bygone day. The windows were small, the doorway low and arched, its whole appearance quaint in the extreme. Ivy of a century's growth clung to the grey, weather-beaten walls, and crept about the windows, while the battlements were clothed in moss of living green. Looking at it, the warm heart of Marjorie overflowed, and her eyes filled.

'Oh, Howard, how beautiful! If only mamma had lived to come with us, to see the house of which she had heard so much and so often from papa!' she exclaimed, in tones of yearning regret.

Howard did not speak, but, handing his sister from the carriage, took her on his arm and entered the house. The servants were gathered in the hall, anxiously waiting to see the Laird's sister, who was to be their mistress until he brought a wife home to Traquair. The sweet, open, girlish face, the pleasant smile, the frankly outstretched hand to one and all, won their hearts at once; and one who had grown grey in the service of the Traquairs, and who had mourned over its long desolation, ran sobbing from them in his joy.

As the brother and sister stepped beneath their own roof-tree, an overwhelming sense of loneliness, and of great responsibility, suddenly came upon them both, and Marjorie's fingers tightened on her brother's manly arm. He drew her into the library, and threw about her a protecting arm, upon which she was glad to hide her wet eyes and trembling lips.

'This is a great heritage, Marjorie, bringing with it a great responsibility,' he said, with a falter in his manly voice. 'You will help me to do my work well?'

'Yes, dear Howard, with all my heart, so long as you need me,' Marjorie answered back; 'and God will help us both.'

'I would seek not only to restore in some measure the former honour of Traquair, Marjorie, but to spend and be spent in God's service, who has so unspeakably blessed us,' said Howard dreamily. 'With such opportunities for doing good, may He help us to use them all for His glory, and the good of those about us.'

Entering with such feelings, such earnest resolutions, upon his inheritance, did Howard Traquair not bid fair to become a model master, a boundless influence for good in Traquair? Ay, truly; and bright, bright was the day now dawning for Traquair and Glenshee.

That was an evening of quiet but deep joy for the brother and sister; and though

Elsie Beatoun's answer to his question had cast a shadow over the heart of Howard Traquair, he was too manly to allow it to master him, or make him gloomy and morose. With so many blessings, dared he repine though one was withheld, even although it seemed the sweetest one on earth? From the lips of their gentle English mother, Howard and Marjorie Traquair had learned the most precious truths of religion, the sweetest and most useful lessons of life. One she had never failed to impress upon their minds, and it was the fruit of her own chequered experience, was, never to allow disappointment to take too deep a hold upon their hearts, but to cheerfully accept the portion allotted to them in this life, thanking God that it was no worse. Howard Traquair remembered that gentle teaching, and it was in that spirit he accepted what was the greatest disappointment he had yet experienced. The evening was spent in roaming through the wide and spacious rooms of the old house, exploring the picture gallery and the armoury, and a thousand other things which teemed with bygone associations, with many strange and fascinating memories of the past.

They were up betimes next morning, for Howard was anxious to take Marjorie out of doors. She was so interested, so pleased, so rapturous over everything, that unconsciously the spell of her sunshine was cast over her brother's heart, banishing every thought but the happiness of the present. And it *was* happiness, to look abroad from the windows of the stately mansion upon the wide acres of hill and dale, wood and meadow, which owned his sway. Traquair of Traquair and Glenshee! Ay, it was a proud, proud name indeed!

After a long ramble through the park and surrounding woods, they returned home to prepare for a drive round the neighbourhood. They were met by a servant, who announced visitors in the drawing-room.

'Already, Marjorie!' laughed Howard Traquair. 'Are you ready to play the hostess? Can you assume, in a moment, that stately dignity which Aunt Anne is so particular about, and which she would say befits a Traquair?'

'I cannot be dignified, Howard. I wonder would Aunt Anne call it a breach of good manners were I to appear in the drawing-room in this costume?' said Marjorie wonderingly.

'Whether or no, you look charming,' said Howard gallantly; and he looked admiringly at the neat, girlish figure, in its simple muslin garb; at the sweet, winsome face smiling under the big sun-hat.

'Well, come away,' smiled Marjorie back. 'Sir James and Lady Graham-Orde, Mr. and Miss Hamilton. Do you know any of them, Howard?'

'Only Sir James; a fine old gentleman, with whom you will be at home at once. They live at Castle-Orde, the big frowning keep on the brow of yonder hill,' said Howard, and that speech brought them to the door of the drawing-room. When they entered, Sir James Graham-Orde, who was standing on the hearth, came forward with outstretched hands. He was a tall, military-looking gentleman, past middle life, with a handsome, kindly face, and pleasant, though keen blue eyes.

'Welcome again to your inheritance, Mr. Traquair,' he said heartily. 'And this is your sister? My dear, let me kiss you. Your father and I were boys together, and many a happy day we had trout-fishing in the Garry.'

That greeting put Marjorie at her ease at once, and she was able to turn with perfect self-possession to her other guests.

Lady Graham-Orde's words of welcome to Scotland were if possible warmer than her husband's; her childless heart warmed to the sweet, frank, unaffected girl who looked up into her face with a smile, and a tear struggled for the mastery in her eye.

'Miss Hamilton—Miss Traquair, Mr. Keith Hamilton; my niece and nephew from the Lowlands,' said Lady Graham-Orde; and Marjorie bowed, first to the tall, pale, aristocratic-looking young lady, and then to her handsome brother. His eyes, as he bent them upon her flushed face, were full of undisguised admiration.

Keith Hamilton had been in dead earnest about Elsie Beatoun, but, seeing she had so absolutely refused to listen to him, he had done his best to think no more about her, and was now free to admire another. He had gone off to the Continent after Elsie went to Lyndon, and his mother and sister saw no more of him for months. But at Christmas he appeared at Alnwick Hall, apparently cured.

For a time the conversation was general, turning upon such topics as Highland scenery and life, and the prospects for the fishing and shooting season. Edith Hamilton, anxious for a private word with Miss Traquair, at last managed to move to her side, to a small table, out of hearing of the others.

'You have just come from Lyndon Priory, Miss Traquair. Pray tell me something of Elsie Beatoun,' she said eagerly. 'Is she well?'

'Oh yes, Elsie is well. She is coming to Traquair, Miss Hamilton, in the autumn. If you are at Castle-Orde then, you will see her,' answered Marjorie, and quite unconsciously glanced in her brother's direction as she spoke. Edith Hamilton noted that look, and put upon it her own construction.

'Tell me something more about her. Next week my brother and I go home to Midlothian. We have not been at Tyneholm for fully a year; and I shall be pleased to carry to Elsie's old friends the latest news of her.'

'Really there is little to tell, Miss Hamilton,' smiled Marjorie. 'Our life at Lyndon was very quiet. Aunt Anne is not strong, you know, and Elsie is devoted to her.'

'Lady Traquair returns that devotion. She will be extremely fond of Elsie, I should imagine?' said Miss Hamilton inquiringly.

'Oh yes; Aunt Anne worships Elsie, I verily believe. Howard and I thought she was even selfish in her love sometimes. I do not know how she will ever part with her,' said Marjorie, and again her unconscious eyes travelled to her brother's face. He was not many yards distant, and she was only wondering whether their conversation was audible to him.

'Ah, then, there *is* a prospect of Elsie leaving her grandmother,' said Edith Hamilton, with a slightly amused smile, which provoked an answering one on Marjorie's face.

'Elsie is very fair and loveable, Miss Hamilton, and she will not likely remain at Lyndon all her life,' she replied lightly. 'You knew Elsie's life in Scotland?' she added inquiringly.

'Intimately. The people with whom she

lived are farmers on our lands of Tyneholm,' answered Miss Hamilton.

Another question was upon Marjorie's lips, which, for Howard's sake, she was longing to ask. But she would be loyal to Elsie; for since Elsie had not told her, what right had she to pry into that past life, to learn its innocent secrets from the lips of others?

'I should think they must have missed her very much,' she said a little sadly. 'I hear Lady Graham-Orde talking of going; you will excuse me, Miss Hamilton, I must speak to her.'

'I have a bit of news for you, Keith,' said Edith Hamilton the first moment she was alone with her brother. 'From what Miss Traquair said, I gather that Elsie is engaged to her brother, and that the marriage is likely to take place in the autumn.'

'A good match for her. Traquair seems a fine fellow,' replied Keith, his careless tone proving that the news did not affect him vitally; 'and his sister is very charming. When Elsie becomes the Lady of Traquair and Glenshee, will it be *congé* for her, I wonder, or will they be going to live happily *en famille?*'

'I don't know, Keith; of course I did not ask. But I wonder what they will say to this at Lintlaw.'

'I don't know. It will be rather a drop, I should imagine, on Dalrymple of Carlowrie. I say, Edith, I wish you'd get my mother to ask the Traquairs to Tyneholm while we're there, will you?'

'Ask her yourself, Keith; you know you'll get anything from mamma for the asking,' replied Edith. 'I cannot help thinking of this news, Keith. Lady of Traquair and Glenshee! What a position for our unpretending little Elsie! She could patronize *me* then if she liked, Keith, for Traquair is an older and more honourable name than Hamilton. Won't I triumph over mamma! She used to laugh so at me for saying Elsie would grace any station, and that I believed she was a lady born.'

'Elsie has never been back at Lintlaw since she left, I suppose?' said Keith.

'I am not sure, but I rather think not. From what mamma saw of Lady Anne Traquair, and also from what Miss Traquair said to-day, I should imagine that Elsie will have some difficulty in getting away from her grandmother. It will be better for her too, Keith, not to keep up intercourse with the Dalrymples. Now that Mrs. Dalrymple is dead, it would not matter so much. I should have been sorry if she had been grieved over the parting from Elsie. Of course she can be properly grateful, and all that, without making a fuss over them. How I should like to see Elsie again! We must make an effort to come here in August. You were always fond of shooting over the moors of Castle-Orde.'

Keith laughed at his sister's little bit of diplomacy.

'You get the Traquairs to Tyneholm next month, Edith, and I'll arrange the autumn visit,' he replied. 'So we will make a bargain of it.'

So they laid their plans, and talked over Elsie's coming as mistress of Traquair, as if it was a settled thing. Edith Hamilton had allowed her imagination to get the better of her, and because she thought it would be a suitable match for Elsie, at once resolved that it was to take place.

But when autumn came, Elsie Beatoun's future was settled in another way.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAR LINTLAW AGAIN.

IN the parlour window at Lintlaw sat Christian Dalrymple on a summer afternoon, busy with the weekly pile of mending. The house was very quiet, Mr. Dalrymple being busy in the hayfield, Effie picking currants for the jelly-making, and the laddies, as usual, at school. Christian liked the quiet hour intervening between dinner and tea; for then, over her knitting or sewing, she could recall tenderest, sweetest memories of 'mother,' and think over all the blessings and joys as well as the cares of her life. I think Christian's face was, if possible, sweeter than it used to be.

Her experience as a sister-mother in that motherless household had lent to her an added tenderness and gentleness. Looking at her, you seemed to know that she had care and thought for everybody, and that she was, indeed, a guiding light, a pillar of strength and loving-kindness to Lintlaw. She was very happy,—happier, I believe, than she had ever been before. Her hands were full, and her heart too, for there were many, many claims upon her love; but though her labours knew no end, though household and family cares so encompassed her that she had little time for any thought of self, she had her reward in her father's utter dependence and strange rugged clinging to her, in Effie's looking up for guidance in learning of household ways, in the clamorous demands made upon her time by the noisy laddies, whom mother had been so 'wae' to leave. Then, had she not that other love, purified, strengthened, grown sweeter and stronger and more precious in its unselfishness, to cheer her on her way; and last and best of all, the consciousness that God's blessing was upon her aye? It was nine months now since mother went away from Lintlaw. The first bitter edge of the grief had worn away, and now it was only a tender, lingering regret,—a regret which at times became a yearning hunger of the heart, and caused the eyes to overflow at sight of the empty chair. Not yet had Christian quite lost the habit of looking to see that mother in her accustomed place. Sometimes, especially in the stillness of the afternoons, she would catch herself listening for her stirring in the bedroom up-stairs, and then hold her breath, almost expecting to hear her footfall on the stair. Not all at once can we lay aside these little things, and I think it well that the weaning comes so gradually, it seems less hard to bear. Sorrow will lead us gently, if we will allow ourselves to be led; and even in the path of shadows there is a strange, fearful joy, which savours more of heaven than earth. Such Christian Dalrymple had often experienced since that mournful day on which mother left Lintlaw.

About three o'clock Christian heard Rover's warning bark, as he lay basking in the sun in front of the house, and she rose and went to the door to see if there was any one coming. Shading her eyes with her hand, she saw coming across the Cows' Park from the Lady's

Road the angular figure of Miss Ritchie of Scotstoun. Then Christian went back to see that the kettle was on the hob, and stole away to meet her, calling to Effie, as she went past the garden dyke, to leave her currant-picking and get her face washed.

Christian was dressed for the afternoon in a print dress, a white ground with a running black flower upon it; a nice black apron, and her usual spotless collar and cuffs. The print dress was her father's especial admiration, and the admiration of somebody else as well.

She had not far to go, for Miss Ritchie was a brisk walker, and was just preparing to step over the stile when Christian reached it.

'I saw you coming, Miss Ritchie,' said Christian blithely. 'I am pleased to see ye. What's come ower ye this long time?'

'I dinna ken; ae thing an' anither. Are ye yer lane?' queried Miss Ritchie.

'Yes, an' no' much adae. This was washin' week, an' I aye tak' a rest for twa days after it.'

'Are ye aye washin' awa' yersel', Kirsten?' queried Miss Ritchie, as they leisurely approached the house. 'Ye're an awfu' lassie.

Workin' early an' late, an' ay sae blithe an' cheery. The very sicht o' ye does a body guid.'

'Mother aye said a laugh was cheap medicine, an' seldom failed to cure,' said Christian, not sadly, but with that tender mingling of regret and love which was inseparable from any thought or mention of her mother.

'Ay,' said Miss Ritchie. 'Oh, Kirsten, woman, I miss yer mither,' she added, with an earnestness which had something yearning and passionate about it.

'A'body misses mother,' replied Christian very softly, and her tender eyes travelled with unconscious but loving gaze to the green braeside of Crichtoun, where the gowans blew above a precious grave.

Then in silence they entered the house, and though Miss Ritchie refused as usual to go up-stairs to take off her bonnet, she laid it down on the side-table, and they sat down in the window to have a quiet chat.

'An' hoo's the minister, Kirsten?' inquired Miss Ritchie, with her usual lack of ceremony. 'He'll hae sitten doon to his bachelor ways in the Manse again?'

'Yes; he was here yestreen, an' he'll be here the night likely,' answered Christian, with a little smile. 'It's just his e'enin' walk frae the Manse to Lintlaw.'

'That's weel. He maun be a great comfort to you, an' you to him,' said Miss Ritchie. 'I never saw twa sae weel fitted, nor I never saw twa bear a trial in a mair beautifu' spirit. Ye are a lesson to us a', Kirsten Dalrymple.'

'Wheesht, wheesht, Miss Ritchie,' said Christian, and her eyes filled. 'Only oor duty, plain and simple. It lay straight in my way, an' I couldna pass it by. I deserve nae praise, though I mony a time think no' mony men wad hae dune just like Mr. Laidlaw.'

'Ye may say't; but yer reward's comin', yours an' his, and there'll be a happy wife at the Manse by and by,' said Miss Ritchie. 'Weel, Kirsten,' she broke off, with a sudden change of tone, 'I've comed to tell ye I've made a perfect fule o' mysel'.'

'In what way, Miss Ritchie?' asked Christian, but her eyes were brimming with laughter, for she had a pretty good guess at what Miss Ritchie meant.

'Oh, I believe ye ken brawly. I'm five-an'-forty, Kirsten Dalrymple, an' I'm gaun to mak' a fule o' mysel' by marryin' Robbie Blair afore Martinmas,' said Miss Ritchie, with a comical blending of humour and earnestness in her manner. 'I couldna rest till I comed to tell ye, Kirsten, as I wad hae telled yer mither had she been here.'

'God bless ye, an' gie ye every happiness, Miss Ritchie,' said Christian heartily, and, bending forward, she took Miss Ritchie's toil-hardened palm in her firm, kindly clasp. 'I'm sure ye'll be baith happy and comfortable at Newlandburn, an' it's nearer Lintlaw than Scotstoun.'

'Ay, an' ye dinna think me sic a fule after a'?' said Miss Ritchie wistfully. 'I said to Robbie Blair I thocht perfect shame to let folk ken. It's no' as I had been a young lass siccan as you, Kirsten.'

'Why should ye think shame? Ye should rather be prood, as ony woman might be, o' a fine man like Mr. Blair,' said Christian. 'I'm sure father an' a'body that hears it 'll be pleased. I'll be yer bridemaiden, if ye like, Miss Ritchie.'

'God bless ye, Kirsten, ye are yer mither's dochter, I can say nae mair,' said Miss Ritchie, and she actually shed a few tears of emotion.

Thus Christian Dalrymple was sister and friend in one to the lonely middle-aged woman whom many made fun of, never thinking of the good, sound, true heart which underlay the eccentric ways. Before Christian could say any more upon the interesting subject of Miss Ritchie's approaching wedding, there was a knock at the door, and presently Effie showed in Katie Gray of Southside, a bonny, winsome lassie, a frequent visitor and a great favourite at Lintlaw. She stayed to her tea, of course, and about seven o'clock Hew came over from Carlowrie to compare his haymaking progress with his father's.

Hew Dalrymple had either cast aside or buried deeply all the bitter pain which Elsie's faithlessness had caused him. Her name was never mentioned either in Lintlaw or Carlowrie, but she was not and would never be forgotten. Only it was better not to speak about her, because all the talking in the world would never explain away her ungrateful treatment of those who had loved her so well. Miss Ritchie left at seven to be home in time for her milking, but Katie Gray remained to supper at Lintlaw, and Hew took her home.

'I say, father,' said Hew just as they were leaving, 'the Laird's folk came to Tyneholm the day. I saw the Laird at a distance craw-shooting in the wud at the Back Braes.'

'Ay, man, then we maun be at him aboot Carlowrie fences, an' aboot sinkin' a new well for ye.'

'Ay, I think that. There's neither water for man nor beast at Carlowrie. The Laird 'll dae that for us, I dinna doot,' replied Hew. 'Weel, Katie, are ye ready?'

'Comin', Hew. I'm just askin' Christian for a pattern for a toilet cover. Men folks dinna ken onything aboot that,' laughed Katie, and came out to the door, rolling up her work as she spoke.

After the good-nights were said, Christian and her father stood a minute on the door-step watching the well-matched pair go down the path together.

'Ay, Kirsten, div ye think it's Katie Gray that's to be mistress o' Carlowrie efter a'?' said Lintlaw slyly.

A tremulous smile touched Christian's sweet lips, and she shook her head. '*That'll* never be, father,' was all she said; for none knew better than Christian whose image dwelt abidingly in Hew's constant heart. It was not in the Dalrymples to cast love off and put it on at will. Once and for all was their way.

Just as Hew and Katie Gray emerged from Lintlaw road-end, a gentleman on horseback rode swiftly past in the direction of Newlandrigg. Darkness was beginning to creep over by the Camp Wood, but it was light enough for them to recognise the Laird on Highflyer, and for him to distinguish them. Hew touched his cap, Keith Hamilton turned in his saddle, and returned the salutation with a broad smile on his face. Evidently Hew Dalrymple, as well as he, had concluded not to mourn over Elsie Beatoun. Of course he did not fail to mention the little incident to his sister, and, needless to say, she was greatly interested, a little chagrined, perhaps, for she expected to find Hew Dalrymple disconsolate for the loss of Elsie.

Next morning she drove her ponies through Newlandrigg, and up the familiar way to

Lintlaw. Leaving them with the footman down beside the duck-pond, she walked up the brae and through the trees round to the front of the house. Then she caught sight of Christian in the garden, with a basket over her arm, among the currant bushes, and instead of going straight to the house, she went past the gig-house and through the garden gate. It creaked on its hinges when she opened it, and then Christian looked round. Her face paled slightly, for the sight of Edith Hamilton recalled many memories both bitter and sweet. Nevertheless she set down her basket, and came forward to meet her quietly and with outstretched hand.

'Welcome back to Tyneholm, Miss Edith,' she said courteously. 'I am pleased to see you look so well and strong.'

'Thank you, Christian; I never was better, and I never was so glad, I think, to get back to Tyneholm. And how are you and Mr. Dalrymple, and all the rest?'

'They are well, thank you,' answered Christian, and slightly turned her head away, for the sweet eyes were troubled, and somehow a blurring shadow seemed to have fallen all at once over the sunshine of the summer day.

'Will ye come in, Miss Hamilton?' she added at length. 'Father's away to Haddington Fair, an' the laddies are at the school, but Effie and me 'll be pleased to see you.'

'I will just sit here for a little, Christian, and do you go on with your blackberry gathering,' said Miss Hamilton, seating herself on the rustic bench which, at Elsie's suggestion, Hew had long ago erected under the apple-tree right in the middle of the garden, facing the gate.

Christian silently turned to the currant-bushes, but her fingers trembled so that the few berries she picked fell to the ground before they reached the basket.

'Oh, Christian, I cannot bear to come to Lintlaw when your dear mother is not here,' cried Edith Hamilton, breaking the silence and bursting into tears. It was but another tribute to the memory of the angel-mother who would be sorely missed by gentle and simple alike for many a day. These tears banished the momentary bitterness which had touched Christian's heart at sight of Edith

Hamilton, to whom they still attributed, indirectly at least, their woful separation from Elsie. One thing Christian earnestly hoped, that Miss Hamilton would not mention Elsie's name, lest her prudence should vanish, and she should speak out of the fulness and the sorrow of her heart.

'I heard, Christian, how nobly you gave up your own happiness to fill your mother's place,' said Miss Hamilton gently. 'It was most unselfish.'

'Not so very unselfish, Miss Hamilton,' said Christian, with a slight smile. 'It was no trial to me to live on in Lintlaw,—with my father and the rest. I love them and they love me, so it is happiness for us all to be together.'

'That is a nice way to put it, Christian; nevertheless, if you are like other women, it must have been a trial. And how is your brother at Carlowrie?'

'He is well, thank you, Miss Hamilton,' replied Christian very low, and again turned her face away, knowing it was coming now.

'Poor fellow, it must have been hard for him to give up all thought of Elsie. Of course you hear often from her?'

'Can *you* tell me anything about Elsie, Miss Hamilton?' asked Christian. 'We heard that she was to be married in the summer to the Laird of Traquair.'

'Oh, you *have* heard *that* rumour, Christian? Yes, I can confirm it. We have just returned from Castle-Orde, and the day before we left we called at Traquair, and heard from Miss Traquair that Elsie is well and happy, and devoted to her grandmother. And from what she added, I gathered that it was likely she will make her home at Traquair in the autumn.'

Christian's face was turned away again, for not until to-day had all faith in Elsie been quenched in her heart. For Hew's sake she had hoped on even against hope, but all that was over now, and Elsie, in the new and increased grandeur of her wedded life, would be further than ever removed from Lintlaw.

'God give her happiness in her new life, Miss Hamilton,' she managed to say at last, for it would not do to show Miss Hamilton what a blow this was. 'Tell me one thing more. Is the Laird of Traquair a man who will make her happy?'

'I should think so. Every one thinks well of him, and my uncle, Sir James Graham-Orde, is always singing his praises. And he is so handsome and noble-looking, like all the Traquairs. He is indeed worthy of our sweet Elsie,' said Miss Hamilton warmly.

'Will you be seeing Elsie before the wedding, Miss Hamilton?'

'I do not know; but we certainly shall see her immediately after her home-coming, as we are going back to Castle-Orde in the autumn.'

'Then you will tell her what good wishes follow her from Lintlaw, Miss Hamilton,' said Christian quietly. 'Now, won't you come in, and take a drink of milk and a bit scone as you used to do?'

'Not to-day, thank you, Christian. I must be going; Macpherson is waiting for me down at the pond. But stay, tell me,—I am so interested in everything that concerns you,—is it true that your brother is to marry Mr. Gray's daughter at Southside?'

Christian laughed.

'Dinna believe a' ye hear, Miss Hamilton. Mony besides Katie Gray hae been spoken of as mistress o' Carlowrie,' she replied, and would give her curious questioner no more satisfaction than that. She was rather impatient to-day of Miss Hamilton's talk of their affairs; she had not yet learned all her mother's gentleness and forbearance. So Miss Hamilton went away, and when she got home she sat down and wrote a letter to Marjorie Traquair. She would have written to Elsie if she had known her address.

'When you write to Elsie Beatoun, dear Miss Traquair,' she wrote, 'tell her I have seen all her old friends at Lintlaw, and that they are well, and asking kindly for her. Also tell her that I hear the rumour, which is sure to be true enough, that Hew Dalrymple is to be married by and by to Katie Gray of Southside. Nothing but marrying and giving in marriage, Miss Traquair. When will our time come?'

Marjorie Traquair did not fail faithfully to remit Miss Hamilton's words in her next letter to Elsie. So Edith Hamilton's idle imagination and foolish meddling with the affairs of others, added yet another pain to Elsie's sore heart, and made more hopeless the web of misunderstanding and estrangement which lay between her and Lintlaw.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY ANNE'S WILL.

SEPTEMBER was wearing to a close. Harvest was past in the sheltered and peaceful lands which surrounded Lyndon Priory. The leaves were golden and russet-brown on the oaks in the park, and they were beginning to fall noiselessly, for the year was past its prime. Without, there were signs of decay and approaching death, and within, a human life was coming very near its end. The days of the Lady Anne Traquair on earth were numbered. She lay in her bed in her magnificent chamber, for the most part unconscious of what was passing around her. Ay, her life was nearing to its end, and as yet her dreams were all unfulfilled; the ambition for which she had laid upon her conscience a heavy sin had not been realized. Elsie ministered with unceasing care and tenderness by her bed,—a pale, fragile-looking figure, with languid step and lustreless eye, who looked as if she too would very soon lie upon a sickbed. This strange, desolate life, coupled with the agony of her heart-sickness and her unutterable yearning for *home*, was killing Elsie Beatoun, and her grandmother knew it well. I could not write down all that was in the mind of the Lady Anne during these last days, when she became conscious that earth and earthly things were slipping away from her. The indomitable pride which had upheld her in the past had not failed her yet, and there was still sufficient strength of will to enable her to crush down any softer impulse which would at times steal into her heart. Before the Lady Anne was finally laid aside, she had set her house in order. Her London lawyers had come to the Priory, and Mr. Ketterly, the attorney from the neighbouring town of Alchester, was sent for frequently. Evidently she was determined that there should be no confusion, no doubt or trouble concerning her affairs after she was gone. But now everything was in order, nothing had been forgotten or left to a more convenient season; so she frequently said. But what of the affairs of the next world? What of the dread unknown, the unfathomed mystery of that which was to come?

On a grey, still, cheerless afternoon, Elsie was sitting by her grandmother's bedside with a book on her knee, watching while she slept. For a long time there had been no sound in the quiet room but the breathing of the sleeper, and the low, steady tick of the Lady Anne's watch on the dressing-table. By and by, however, Lady Anne stirred, and fixed her hollow eyes on her grand-daughter's face.

'You are there, Elsie?'

'Yes, grandmother, always here when you want me,' replied Elsie, with an infinite gentleness,—the same womanly tenderness, with which in long gone days she had ministered to poor Saunders Beatoun at Carlowrie, was called into play now; only there was a deep pathos in it which was lacking then. Ay, Elsie had passed through the deeps since old Carlowrie days, and lived a very lifetime of sorrow!

'Where is Deborah Conroy, Elsie?'

'Down-stairs, grandmother. Do you want her?'

'No, no; it is you I want. Have you written to Howard and Marjorie yet? Is it in Paris they are? How long will it be before they can be here?'

'Only a few days, grandmother,' answered Elsie soothingly, for the Lady Anne spoke with feverish impatience. 'My letter will have reached them, and probably by this time they are on their way.'

'That is well; I wish they would come before the end. I have some things to say to Howard.'

'Yes, grandmother, I told him that, and I am sure they will come as quickly as they can. Do you feel weaker to-day?'

'I am dying, Elsie,' replied the Lady Anne, with a strange calm, which impressed Elsie with a kind of dread.

'You are perfectly happy and at peace, grandmother?' she said timidly. 'Heaven is a happier home than this.'

'Child, at your age earth should be fairer than heaven. It is only old age, borne down with many sorrows and cares, which longs to be at rest. Tell me, are you still nursing in your breast a hopeless passion? and is the true love of Howard Traquair to go unrewarded?'

'I am done with love, grandmother,' replied Elsie, striving to speak very quietly, though her heart was throbbing with rebellious pain.

'That is a foolish way to talk,' said the Lady Anne, with severity. 'What is to become of you when I am gone?'

'I don't know, grandmother; God will open up my way, and there will be a home provided, I have no fear,' replied Elsie bravely; but suddenly her composure gave way, and she buried her face upon the coverlet, sobbing bitterly. She was desolate indeed.

'Hush! my child, I cannot bear to see you weep,' said the Lady Anne. 'The Priory will be your home, and Deborah Conroy can remain with you without being a burden upon you, for she will have her own income to support her. And perhaps some day you will change towards Howard Traquair.'

'Dear grandmother, you are kind and thoughtful, and I am heedless of your weakness; forgive me,' said Elsie; and, drying her tears, she rose to administer a stimulant to the feeble sufferer.

'Elsie,' said the sick woman, fixing hollow, wistful eyes upon her as she bent over her with the cordial in her hand, 'you believe I love you, that I would do anything to further your happiness?'

'Dear grandmother, have I not proved it?' asked Elsie simply and lovingly.

'And after I am gone, Elsie, promise me you will think kindly of me, and whatever transpires, you will try to believe that all I did was out of love for you, from a great desire for your welfare,' said the Lady Anne, with a strange eagerness.

'Dear grandmother, what strange things are these you say? Do I not love you? Do I not *know* how you have loved and cared for me, and borne with my weakness and my repinings with gentleness so long?' queried Elsie, with gentle reproach.

The Lady Anne put up her hand as if to deprecate her words.

'Hush! hush! you do not know. But kiss me, Elsie. You have been a good and dutiful child, an unspeakable comfort to me. I am weary now, and would sleep; later—to-morrow, perhaps—I shall tell you; yes, all.'

So saying, the Lady Anne turned drowsily upon her pillow and closed her eyes. Elsie stood silently by the bed until the quiet, regular breathing indicated that her grandmother was asleep, then she stole softly down-stairs to ask Deborah Conroy to come and sit by the sickbed, while she took a few hours' rest. She did not undress, but, simply throwing off her outer garments, wrapped a rug round her, and lay down on the couch in her dressing-room. She was very weary, and fell asleep at once. Shortly after sunset she was awakened by a maid hurriedly entering the room.

'Miss Beatoun, will you come up-stairs, please? Miss Conroy sent me. Lady Traquair is—is'—

'Not dead, Isabella?' asked Elsie, springing to her feet in affright.

'No, ma'am, but coming very near the end. Oh, make haste, she is calling for you.'

Half-dressed as she was, and with her hair streaming about her shoulders, Elsie ran to her grandmother's room. She was stopped on the threshold by the sight of Deborah Conroy, who held up a warning finger, and there were tears on her poor, thin cheeks. Elsie stole softly across the floor, and took one look at the face of her grandmother. It was enough; for though it was long since she had last seen death that memorable Sabbath morning at Carlowrie, she was not deceived. Ay, the long struggle was over now; the sad, proud, embittered life closed for ever; and the Lady Anne had gone to render her account above.

'Oh, Deborah, why did you not call me sooner?' cried Elsie, in tones of anguish.

'I could not, dear; it is not five minutes gone since Anne awoke out of her sleep, and cried out, "Elsie, Elsie, forgive!" then she just sank back and expired,' replied poor Deborah Conroy, wringing her hands helplessly, for what was to become of her and of the Priory without the guiding of that strong mind and will?

'Poor grandmother!' said Elsie tenderly and sadly, and, bending down, kissed with loving lips the pain-lined brow. Then, leaving the others to perform the last sad offices, she stole away back to her room to weep in solitude, for she indeed felt as if all she loved on earth were taken away from her now. No, not yet; for Howard and Marjorie were left. While they lived she would not be utterly friendless, and her heart went out to them in a rush of yearning love.

Strange and sad and still fell that chill September night upon Lyndon Priory. Deborah Conroy and Elsie sat together by the dining-room fire, talking low and softly of the dead. There was nothing but tenderness in their thoughts of her, and even Deborah Conroy's memories of her kinswoman were softened by the strange, sad thought that she was gone away from Lyndon for evermore.

They retired to rest early, and both slept, for they were worn out with their long and anxious vigil.

All the next day Elsie kept watch at the front windows for the coming of Howard and Marjorie; but the early darkness fell, windows were shut in and lamps lighted at the Priory, yet there were no signs of their arrival. So Elsie had just to settle down by the fireside with Deborah Conroy, and hope they would come to-morrow. About seven o'clock, however, there came a loud knocking at the hall door, and Elsie, hearing Howard's voice, flew to meet him. Oh, what strength and comfort seemed to come to her at sight of his true face! She clung to his hands, and then buried her face upon them; and he felt her hot tears dropping, and had great difficulty in restraining his impulse to clasp her to his heart.

'Dear, dear Howard, how good it is to see you!' she said, with all the wistful simplicity of a child. 'But you are alone. Where is Marjorie?'

'She was too much fatigued, dear, to come down to-night. We only arrived in London this afternoon, after travelling night and day. But she will come to-morrow,' said Howard gently, and turned to greet courteously Deborah Conroy, who had followed Elsie out to the hall.

After Howard had changed his travel-stained garments and partaken of some refreshment, he went away up alone to the chamber of death. But Elsie followed, and stole softly in behind him, and he almost started to find her standing beside him at the bed.

'Poor Aunt Anne!' said Howard, and folded back with reverent hand the covering from the face. So peaceful was that face, that, looking upon it, great rest seemed to steal over Elsie's heart. The pain-lines were gone, the anxious, fretful expression smoothed away, and there had stolen back something of the beauty which had been so rare in early youth.

'The face is sweeter in death than it was in life,' said Howard musingly. 'Tell me how she died.'

Briefly and brokenly Elsie told him of the hastened end; then they talked low and softly of the dead, only remembering her at her best, so swiftly and beautifully does death still all harsher thoughts, and soften what in life was so rugged and unpleasant and hard to bear.

'Dear grandmother! she was ever kind and loving to me. I shall never forget her,' said Elsie, and, bending once more, kissed the marble brow. 'Howard, let us go.'

There was no mention made that night of

any plans for the future, though they were much in the mind of Howard Traquair.

Early on the morrow, Mr. Ketterly, the attorney from Alchester, came to the Priory, and had an interview with Elsie, at which Howard was present. He seemed a little nervous and embarrassed, and, though he had some formidable documents with him, appeared in no hurry to open them.

'Did Lady Traquair make any allusion to the state of her affairs—to the manner in which her bequests were made—in your hearing, Miss Beatoun?' he asked, rubbing his spectacles with his silk handkerchief.

'Only one remark, Mr. Ketterly; she said that the Priory was to be mine,' replied Elsie reluctantly, for she could not bear to discuss such things in the first keenness of her sorrow.

'Just so. Did she make you aware that it was left only conditionally?' pursued Mr. Ketterly.

'No, that was all,' answered Elsie.

Then the lawyer folded out the paper and cleared his throat.

'Some weeks ago, as you are aware, her ladyship sent for me for the purpose of making some change in the will I drew up for her early in the year,' he began. 'I did not think the change she contemplated desirable, and strongly urged her ladyship to leave the document untouched. But it was useless. I presume you, Miss Beatoun, and you, sir,' he added, looking at Howard, 'are perfectly well aware that Lady Traquair's commands were not to be disputed, and that she was seldom turned from any object which she had in view?'

He paused then, for Elsie did not appear to be listening to him. She was indeed looking through the library window down the long avenue, watching for the carriage which was bringing Marjorie to Lyndon.

'May I request your attention, Miss Beatoun, if you please?' he said impressively; and Elsie turned with a start and sat straight up on her chair, with her white, delicate hands folded above her black dress, and her beautiful eyes fixed on his face. That look of child-like innocence somewhat discomposed the hard-headed man of business. Involuntarily Howard took a step nearer to Elsie, dreading what was coming. The lawyer, noting that, smiled slightly, and appeared reassured.

'I need not trouble you with a detailed reading of this document, which might only prove wearisome to you, Miss Beatoun,' he said. 'I will simply state the purport of it, which is that the lands and estate of Lyndon Priory are bequeathed to you solely upon the condition that you become the wife of Mr. Howard Traquair. Failing fulfilment of that condition, Lyndon falls to Miss Marjorie Traquair, with the exception of the sum of two hundred pounds, which will be paid to you on the first day of January of every year while you live. You'—

He stopped abruptly, for with deep-flushed face, and wild, indignant eyes, Elsie sprang to her feet and rushed from the room. The face of Howard Traquair was as pale as death, and set in righteous anger.

'That is a wicked and unjust will, Mr. Ketterly,' he said, with difficulty controlling his ire. 'Must it stand?'

'No power on earth can set it aside. See, it bears the Lady Anne's legible and indisputable signature at the bottom of the page,' replied the lawyer courteously, and held out the paper, but Howard only turned away with a gesture of impatient scorn.

'It is cruel and iniquitous thus to oppress a defenceless girl like Miss Beatoun,' he said bitterly. 'God forgive me, Mr. Ketterly, and grant me more kindly charity towards the dead.'

'As I already stated, I did my utmost to persuade Lady Traquair that a will so worded might only cause confusion and trouble. But pardon the question—Was her ladyship not aware that such a marriage was more than likely to take place?'

'No,' replied Howard briefly and sternly. 'You have lived long enough, Mr. Ketterly, to know that coercion is not the best way to win a woman's heart. I do not know what to say or do, because this wretched document will destroy the pleasant, unrestrained relationship which has hitherto existed between Miss Beatoun and my sister and myself.'

'Mr. Traquair, there is another clause which I had no time to read to Miss Beatoun, but which, though I do not know the circumstances to which it alludes, seems more cruel and unjust still,' said the lawyer in a troubled voice. 'It contains her ladyship's last prayer, which she would seek to make binding upon her grand-daughter's conscience and heart, that she will not return to those with whom she dwelt before she came to Lyndon, and that if she does she will know she is breaking her grandmother's last wish and dying prayer.'

Dark, dark grew the brow of Howard Traquair.

'Mr. Ketterly,' he said, with clear, proud decision, 'may I request that that clause be kept entirely from the knowledge of Miss Beatoun? It will inflict upon her needless pain. Let her go back to those early friends, whom she loves, untrammelled by any such haunting thought. Will you grant my request?'

'Most willingly. I deeply sympathise with Miss Beatoun and with *you*,' was the lawyer's ready and kind reply.

Then Howard abruptly quitted the room and the house. His mind was in a tumult of pain and shame and justifiable wrath. For now, if ever he had had a hope of winning Elsie's love, that hope was dashed to the ground.

'Cruel, cruel!' he muttered to himself as he strode wrathfully through the autumn woods. 'Relentless to the last!'

CHAPTER XIX.

HOME.

ABOUT an hour later Marjorie Traquair arrived at Lyndon Priory. She was met in the hall by Deborah Conroy, who said that Howard and Elsie had gone out together. Marjorie laughed good-humouredly, saying they might have waited for her, then went away contentedly up-stairs to remove her travelling garb. Deborah accompanied her, and, with her usual minuteness of detail, related all that had transpired at the Priory during the last three days. But of what had transpired in the library that morning she was, of course, unaware.

Marjorie had arrived too late to see her aunt, for the coffin lid had been screwed down the previous night. But, after she was rested and refreshed, she went to the darkened room and laid upon the lid the wreath she had brought with her from London. Then she kissed the name upon the silver plate, and stole away, a little saddened, but there was no great grief in her heart. She had never loved her Aunt Anne, and being of clearer, more penetrating vision than Elsie, had been oppressed at times with a haunting, indefinable distrust of the haughty mistress of the Priory. She had spoken of it frequently to Howard, and both had compassionated the shrinking, sensitive girl whom the iron will had so completely under control.

Marjorie roamed over the house, too restless to settle at anything, and finally felt herself drawn by some strange impulse towards the deserted and unused picture gallery. She swung back the folding-doors and entered noiselessly, went towards the window, and threw open one of the shutters. Then she started to hear a sound of sobbing at the end of the room, and, looking in the direction from whence it proceeded, beheld, to her unspeakable amazement, the figure of Elsie lying on one of the crimson-covered couches, with her face buried in the pillows. In a moment she was by her side.

'Elsie, Elsie, my darling! I am here, my dear love! It is Marjorie,' she whispered lovingly, marvelling much at Elsie's abandonment of grief. 'Don't sob so, dear; you will make yourself so ill.'

With such soothing and endearing words did Marjorie try to comfort Elsie, until she was able to lift her head and look calmly into her winsome face. The sunshine of her presence, the magic of her happy-hearted smile, weaned Elsie away from her brooding over the many sorrows of her life, and by and by Marjorie coaxed her to get her hat and come out with her for a ramble through the autumn-tinted woods.

'Who do you think we saw in Paris, Elsie?' asked Marjorie, breaking off in the midst of an animated description of the gay capital. 'Some one who admires you very much.'

Elsie shook her head.

'Unless it be Edith Hamilton, I don't know who it could be, Marjorie.'

'It was Keith Hamilton, dear. Such fun! He came to Castle-Orde,—his sister was too poorly to accompany him, and, finding we were away for a trip to Paris, he came off after us. I believe he thought you were of our party,' said Marjorie, with a sly smile, which provoked an answering one on Elsie's pale lips.

'Little he cared. I like Keith Hamilton, Marjorie. He was very kind to me. If he comes to Traquair, don't send him away,' she said gently.

An exquisite blush sprang to Marjorie's rounded cheek, and a lovely light to her eyes.

'When Keith comes to Traquair again, Elsie, and I think it will not be long,' she answered simply, 'I will remember what you said.'

Then Elsie, understanding, paused in the path, and kissed Marjorie with a long, lingering kiss.

'God bless you, Marjorie, and him; you are worthy of each other!' was all she said, but it meant a great deal. Somehow they did not talk much after that, and by and by wended their way through the cool, sweet September air to the house. Elsie ran up-stairs at once, but Marjorie, hearing her brother was in the library, went away to that room for a word with him. One look told her that he was thoroughly out of sorts, that something had happened to trouble and grieve him very much.

'I'm glad you've come, Marjorie,' he said, with a breath of relief, for the very sight of her was like the shining of the sun. 'Sit down till I tell you something which will raise your righteous ire.'

It would be difficult to describe the varying expressions which crossed the face of Marjorie Traquair, while she was listening to her brother's brief recital of the events of the morning. When he was done she sprang to her feet, with flushed face and kindling eyes.

'What a shame! Poor, poor Elsie! that was the cause of her grief to-day!' she exclaimed. 'Let me say it, it will relieve me. Aunt Anne is an old wretch!' she added, getting out the word with great energy. 'Yes, I know it is wrong to say it now she is dead, but if she had been alive I would have said it to her. I was often very nearly saying that or something worse when we were here. Me take the

Priory, indeed! Of course Elsie knows very well it is hers just the same as if that sinful thing had never been written.'

'But, Marjorie, unless Elsie becomes my wife, the Priory *will* be yours even against your will. Elsie cannot keep it,' said Howard moodily. 'The longer one thinks of it, the worse it becomes, I do declare.'

'If Elsie only would! oh, what happiness for us all, Howard!' said Marjorie, with eyes full of tears. 'I am sure she would be happy with you. Do you think that perhaps in time she'—

'I dare not permit myself to hope. We will not speak of it now,' interrupted Howard. 'Well, Marjorie, I can't stay here. The atmosphere of the house is not pleasant to me. Let us get away home as soon after tomorrow as possible.'

'And Elsie?'

'Will go with us, of course. You will ask her, and then I shall assure her, as quietly and earnestly as possible, that she must not think any more about that wretched thing, and that we must just be the same dear friends, brother and sister, if she will, as if it had never come into existence.'

'Howard, how noble you are! How I love and honour my brother!' said Marjorie warmly; and Howard, smiling a little sadly, drew her to him, and fondly kissed her brow.

'Not fonder and prouder than I am of my little sister, my sunbeam!' he said, with an earnestness which filled Marjorie's happy heart to overflowing. Such happy natures gather sunshine everywhere, and cast it about them as they go. God bless them! Like the sunshine and the flowers, the singing birds and every other beautiful thing in nature, they are exquisite exponents of His love.

In the afternoon, Elsie stole down to the drawing-room for a book she had been reading, but upon seeing Howard lying on a couch there she would have at once retreated. But Howard, who had indeed stationed himself there for the purpose of seeing her, sprang to his feet, and begged her to come in. A little ashamed of her haste to escape, Elsie came forward into the room, but with apparent reluctance and embarrassment. There appeared to be truth in Howard's prediction, that the Lady Anne's unjust will was likely to destroy the pleasant relationship which had hitherto existed between Elsie and himself.

'Come in, Elsie; don't look so askance at me,' he said, striving to speak naturally. 'That wretched document is not to make any difference to us, I hope? Let us think no more of it. Nobody but Aunt Anne could possibly have made such a will. It will never trouble me. Let me hear you say the same.'

A faint colour stole to Elsie's cheek, and a slight smile to her lips. It was an unspeakable relief to her to feel at home with Howard again, and to be assured that *he* would never let the will come between them. She had not so many friends now that she could afford to let such as Howard Traquair slip away from her.

'Thank you, Howard,' she said very gently. 'I might have known, but I could not help feeling about it just at first.'

'Of course you couldn't,' said Howard cheerily. 'But come, let me see that all that feeling is swept away by promising to come with Marjorie and me to Traquair after to-morrow is over.'

'Marjorie has spoken of it to me. Yes, I will come, Howard, and thank you very much. What should I do without Marjorie and you *now?*' she said, with fast filling eyes.

'And we'll have jolly times at Traquair, I tell you,' said Howard, with boyish eagerness, to hide a deeper feeling. 'And we'll all be happy together as the day is long.'

'Marjorie speaks of staying some days in Edinburgh, Howard. You would not mind very much if, while we were there, I went out by myself to where I used to live before, just to speak to Aunt Effie? I loved and do love her very much. I would just like to tell her that I have not, and never will, forget them,' said Elsie wistfully.

'My dear, you shall do not only that, but every other thing on which you set your heart. I am not sure but that if you contemplated a journey to the moon, Marjorie and I would not assist you to carry it out,' said Howard, with a twinkle in his eye.'

Elsie smiled also. How could she help it?

'I shall never be able to repay all your kindness, dear Howard, but'—

'We will never speak of it again,' supplemented Howard. 'And if you grow strong and well at Traquair, and our heather-scented mountain air brings back the bloom of yore to your cheek, I shall be more than repaid,' was Howard's answer; and, with a heart strangely at rest, Elsie stole away. The tumult was over now; and though a certain lingering sadness must ever remain in her heart because of what was and what might have been, she saw stretching out before her a life of peace and quiet happiness which might in time suffice.

On the morrow, the oaken casket which contained all that remained of the Lady Anne Traquair was laid in the vault of Lyndon Priory. It had been her expressed desire that her body should not be carried to Scotland, but should be laid to rest among her own people. Strange that, though she had loved her husband so well, and so faithfully mourned his loss, she should not care to sleep beside him in death. It was but another whim of that strange, unfathomable nature, which seemed to take pride in its strong individuality.

On the succeeding morrow, Howard and Marjorie, with Elsie in their care, left the

Priory. All were glad to go; the brother and sister because their hearts were at Traquair, and Elsie because Lyndon Priory had been a species of prison-house to her, where she had been held in bondage, which, though sweetened by love and generous kindness, was bondage still. Between age and youth there is little in common, and the heart of Lady Anne and that of Elsie Beatoun, in its pure and high-souled innocence, were as far apart as earth from heaven. The house was left in the care of Elizabeth Ritchie. Her mistress had left her amply provided for, and a charge like the keeping of the Priory during the absence of the young mistress was one after her own heart. Seeing them all depart so happily together, there was no doubt in her mind that Miss Elsie would ere long become Lady of Traquair, and that in all probability the Priory would only see her for a few weeks or months in the year. That was a very pleasant thought to the soul of Betsy Ritchie.

The journey to Scotland was singularly pleasant. Howard secured a compartment for their own use, and everything was provided for the comfort and ease of the ladies. They travelled by the East Coast Route, so that Elsie was spared passing through any of the familiar scenes of her youth. But when the carriage awaiting them at the station rolled swiftly along the wide, beautiful thoroughfare of Princes Street, Elsie's heart was stirred with wild, unutterable yearnings, with undying memories of the past. On a memorable summer day, three years ago, when Hew and Christian and she had spent a holiday in the city, they had walked through the gardens, and then back on the other side of the street, and there was the very jeweller's window where they had paused to look in and admire the gold and pebble ornaments, and to point out in jest what each would wear upon her wedding day. Howard and Marjorie, understanding something of her thoughts, did not disturb her or speak to her at all.

'You are glad to be in Scotland again, Elsie?' Howard said, as he assisted her to alight at the door of the hotel.

'Yes, yes; Scotland is home to me. At Lyndon I was a stranger in a strange land. In dear Scotland everybody is free,' she answered, with a smile and a tear, which told that the words came from the very heart. After dinner they had a long drive round Arthur's Seat, and Marjorie was rapturous over the beauties of Edinburgh. But Elsie was absorbed and restless, and could not admire anything, so full was her heart and thoughts of what was coming on the morrow. She had planned to go by an early train, and return in the evening; but when the morning came, it brought a strange, inexplicable reluctance, and she allowed the forenoon to slip away. But Howard took her to the station in time for the afternoon train. She took ticket for a little station a mile beyond Gorebridge, not caring that the villagers should recognise her. From this little station she could walk through the fields to Lintlaw, a shorter and pleasanter way than the toilsome ascent from Gorebridge.

'I will be home to-morrow, Howard,' she said, 'unless Aunt Effie wants me to stay another day, and then I shall write.'

'All right. I hope you will have a safe and pleasant journey, dear, and find a warm welcome among your old friends. Take care of yourself, Elsie; I shall not be easy in my mind till I see you again.'

'Oh, I shall be all right, never fear. This is a familiar line, a familiar train to me. You know I have often made this journey, and it is not far,' she replied cheerfully. 'Good-bye.'

The train steamed out of the station, and Elsie sank back in her corner, for many strange memories thronged about her heart. What feelings were hers as she was hurried through the familiar landscape! Past Portobello, with its blue line of shimmering sea; then the neat, picturesque station at Eskbank; and thence on to her destination. At Gorebridge she dared not look out, lest she should see any familiar faces. She was now becoming nervous and excited, and could scarcely keep still her trembling hands. How, oh how would they receive her? she wondered. Would they let her in, or would she find herself forgotten, and cast out of their hearts for ever? Her hope centred in her aunt. Christian and Hew, of course, would be both settled in their own homes; but so long as Aunt Effie dwelt beneath the roof-tree of Lintlaw, it was home to her. The sun was shining with that clear, still brightness peculiar to October, when she left the train and took her way by the familiar field-paths to Lintlaw. It was the same peaceful landscape, unchanged, beautiful as of yore. Yonder the grey battlements of Borthwick, the little church, the school, and Mr. Macdougall's house, where she and Christian had often drank tea in summer days gone by. Were they there still, she wondered, and did they ever talk of her? Presently she left behind the hill from whence Borthwick could be seen, and now the dearest, most familiar scenes of all were before her view.

Harvest was all in-gathered, and the fields were bare and desolate, save where the earth had been upturned by the plough, and showed in rich brown furrows against the stubble. The leaves were red and yellow on the trees, for it had been a late spring, and there had been no wild winds yet to whirl the late foliage to the ground. In the autumn-tinted hedgerows the bramble was black upon the boughs, and there were rowans still and crab-apples where they were wont to be, ripe on the trees which divided the lands of Lintlaw from those of the Mount. With a heart well nigh bursting, Elsie climbed the stile into the wood, and walked with trembling feet down the moss-grown path. When she reached the open gate which led directly into the field at the back of Lintlaw, she stood still, and, leaning against a tree, tried to summon up that calmness and courage which were necessary to enable her to go on. The stackyard was very full, three-and-thirty stacks Elsie mechanically counted, and recalled that there had been but eight-and-twenty the last harvest she had witnessed at Lintlaw. Evidently this had been a prosperous year for Lothian farmers. The full stackyard somewhat obscured the steading, still she could see the long red-tiled roof of the barn, and beyond, the gables of the house itself, from which two blue wreaths of smoke were curling upward to the calm, bright sky.

In the field she must pass on her way down to the farm, there was a great band of men and women digging and gathering the potatoes, and she could hear the echo of their voices and laughter, which told that tongues were as busy as their hands. Mr. Dalrymple was not among them; but, coming up behind the band, 'gaffering' them, was a big strapping lad, whose bronzed face under his broad straw hat bore a striking resemblance to Sandy.

They were working down the drill, so Elsie waited till they had turned again, and were well across the field, before she emerged from her shelter. Then she put up her sunshade, and walked very quickly down the rough, uneven road. None of them recognised her.

She went straight through the big door into the yard at the back of the house, and saw there a strange woman, attired in the garb of an out-worker, scattering corn for the hens. The woman stared at her, but Elsie passed on and through a little door past the gig-house, and round to the front. And there was Davie squatted on the grass, Rover lazily blinking beside him, and a lot of tools and bits of iron scattered about, with which he was working at his beloved machines. At the sound of footsteps he looked up, and then sprang to his feet. There was something strangely familiar in that slender figure, with its flowing black robes, in that sweet, pale face, and in a moment the truth came home to

Davie, and he ran shouting into the house, 'Faither, faither, here's Elsie! Come oot an' see; Elsie's comed hame!' she heard him cry, and even in that moment of supreme feeling she wondered why he said '*father*' and *not* mother.

Before the farmer could get up from his chair (it was just the tea-time at Lintlaw), there was a light footfall in the passage, and he saw in the parlour doorway the figure of Elsie.

'Guid Lord, Elsie, is't you?' he exclaimed, looking at her with dumbfoundered eyes.

'Yes, yes, it's me,' she answered brokenly, and then her eyes travelled hungrily round the room, for the house felt strange and desolate and empty,—she could not tell why.

'What is it? Oh, Uncle Davie, where is Aunt Effie?'

A look of deep surprise swept across the rugged face of David Dalrymple. He passed his hand across his brow, then through his grey hair, and slowly pointed upward.

'Bairn, did ye never hear? That's a strange question,' he said, in a voice like the shaking of the wind among the firs. '"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."'

CHAPTER XX.

CLEARING AWAY THE MISTS.

'IS Aunt Effie dead, Uncle Davie?' asked Elsie, in a voiceless whisper.

'That is surely a needless question for you to ask, Elsie,' said Lintlaw, with some sternness. 'There was news o' her death, ay, an' mony a letter sin syne, sent to you at yer braw English hame.'

The look of utter bewilderment upon Elsie's face deepened, and she swayed and would have fallen, had not Lintlaw caught her in his arms. She clung to him, and hid her face on his broad breast, and Lintlaw, feeling her pitiful trembling, knew that there was some great mystery to be unravelled here, and that she was their own Elsie still.

'Hold me close, Uncle Davie,' she said.

'I never got any letters. I wrote and wrote to you, and then my heart seemed to grow cold and dead. People's hearts don't break in this world, or mine had broken long, long ago. Grandmother is dead, and I was on my way to the north with some friends, when I thought I would like to come just to see *why* you had all forgotten me.'

'There was nae letters came here, Elsie; an' mony, mony a sair heart has been in Lintlaw ower ye,' said Lintlaw. 'There has been black treachery somewhere, my bairn; but wheesht, dinna shake like that. It'll be a' richt noo, please God.'

Elsie still clung convulsively to her uncle, as if afraid that he too should slip from her grasp.

David Dalrymple was deeply and strongly moved, as he had not been since the death of his wife two years before. How he had loved the sweet, fair child who had found a home with them, and what a joy it was to find her still worthy of that love, I cannot try to tell you.

By and by she grew calmer, and looked up into his face with great pathetic eyes. Then he saw how great the change upon the sweet face, how worn and thin it was, how aged before its time. After all, hers had been the keener, more hopeless grief.

'My bairn, what has the ill English folk dune to ye? Ye are no' the same,' he said; and, to Davie's astonishment, he saw his father, with a great gentleness, stroke the sweet, sad face uplifted to his.

'It was the waiting that did it, Uncle Davie; but oh, I want—I want Aunt Effie!' she said, and, breaking from him, flung herself on the sofa and burst into tears. They brought relief to the overcharged heart.

'But where are all the rest? Christian will be at the Manse, I suppose? but Robbie and Effie, where are they?' she asked at length.

'Christian is not at the Manse yet,' said Mr. Dalrymple. 'When her mither died, she wad bide to fill her place a wee; and she *has* filled it,' he added, with emotion. 'This is Miss Ritchie's wedding-day, and Hew and Christian, and Effie too, are at the marriage, and Robbie's in Douglas's seed-shop in Dalkeith, an' Sandy's gafferin' the workers, an' here's Davie.'

'Christian not at the Manse yet! but—but Mr. Laidlaw did not marry somebody else, I hope?' queried Elsie eagerly. She had not been prepared for so many overwhelming changes, and could hardly grasp them all.

A smile now came upon Lintlaw's face, like the breaking of the sun through the clouds.

'Oh no; he's made o' true stuff, Elsie. An' noo that Effie's able to manage so weel,—she's sixteen, ye ken,—they're to be mairret in the spring.'

'I don't know what to say, Uncle Davie. How have so many things happened here when nothing happened to me?'

'Are ye no' mairret, Elsie? Maybe I'm speakin' to the Leddy o' Traquair?' said Lintlaw, a sudden thought striking him.

'Oh no, Uncle Davie; I am Elsie Beatoun still, though grandmother was very anxious that I should drop my own name and be called Miss Traquair,' said Elsie mournfully.

'The news that yer marriage was to be, was sent to us by yer grandmither, an' then by Miss Hamilton,' said Lintlaw. 'We thocht ye were to be married this August just gane by.'

'Did grandmother write and tell you I was to marry the Laird of Traquair?' queried Elsie.

'She did that; an' she offered us money,—money, Elsie, because ye had had yer hame at Lintlaw; but yer aunt an' me took nae notice o' *that* letter, of course. It was an insult to oor love for you, to the very name of Dalrymple.'

'And you never got any of my letters, Uncle Davie? I am sure I wrote twenty or more.'

'Never ane; an' I'm sure there was as many written to you frae here,' replied Lintlaw sternly.

'Then grandmother must have kept them back. How could she do such a cruel, cruel, wicked thing!'

'The Lord only kens; but she's deid, ye say, an' dootless by this time has gotten her reward,' was Lintlaw's brief reply. 'But come, my bairn, tak' aff yer bannet. Ye've come to bide; *hame* to Lintlaw, as Davie cried in at the door. This' ll be a blithe, blithe nicht when the bairns come hame.'

'Uncle Davie.' Elsie's voice fell very low, and her pale face flushed deep crimson.

'Weel, my bairn.'

'Shall I see Hew's wife to-night? Is she at the wedding too? and will she come up with them? I—I—don't think I could bear it just yet.'

'Hew's wife!' Very comical to see at that moment was the face of David Dalrymple. 'Guid guide us a', lassie, whatten ferlie's that ye've gotten in yer heid?'

'Is—is—Hew not married, Uncle Davie?'

Lintlaw shook his head.

'Na, na; Carlowrie's waitin' on its mistress yet, an' wha kens, she'll maybe come hame by and by. Lassie, my son has never forgotten ye. Ye are as dear to him at this meenit as ever ye were. I say it wha ken him best on earth. Many a time my heart's been sair for the laddie, but he has manfully borne his cross.'

'Oh, Uncle Davie, they told me he had forgotten me, that he had never loved me, that he was to be married to Katie Gray. I believed it, uncle, because I never heard from Hew or anybody,' cried Elsie, springing to her feet, for was not this the crowning surprise of all?

'This has been an unco ravelling, Elsie,' said David Dalrymple. 'Thanks be to God, it is made plain at last. We maun pray for kindly thochts o' her that's awa', but it's no easy.'

'Will they be late at the wedding, uncle?' asked Elsie by and by.

'No; it is a very quiet affair, an' Mr. and Mrs. Blair were to leave by the last train for Edinburgh. So the bairns'll be hame afore the darkenin'.'

Then Elsie slipped away out of the room and up-stairs, to be alone for a little with her own strange tumult of thought. Joy and grief were strangely intermingled in her heart,—joy that she was not forgotten at Lintlaw; grief that dear Aunt Effie, her more than mother, had not lived to see this day. But up yonder she knew all, thought Elsie, as she looked through the south window of the best room to the green braes of Crichtoun, with an unutterable sense of peace stealing over her weary heart.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of what had transpired at home, the bairns were quietly enjoying themselves in the parlour at Scotstoun, among the friends gathered together to see Miss Ritchie married.

Very nice did the bride look in her neat, well-fitting brown silk, and very happy too; although she confided to Christian, when she went to make ready for her journey,—'That it was raither a thocht to a body gettin' mairret; an' she didna ken hoo lassies could flee into the bonds withoot muckle consideration.'

Robbie Blair looked his best, which was saying a good deal, and everybody said they were a fine-looking, well-matched pair. After the carriage drove away with the husband and wife, the guests began to talk of leaving. A few of the gentlemen remained to talk about his sister's marriage with Geordie Ritchie, but the Lintlaw bairns went away, the minister of course accompanying them. Christian and Effie just wore their Sabbath gowns,—soft grey merino, relieved by knots of cherry ribbon,—and very sweet, indeed, did Christian look in that garb. She walked behind with Mr. Laidlaw, of course, Hew and Effie being a good way in front. When they got up the road a little bit, they saw their father and the laddies waiting at the gate, and Effie declared there was somebody else,—a woman, too,—who had run away up the path at sight of them. When they got to the foot of the brae, to their astonishment the laddies rent the air by a hearty cheer.

'Hurrah! hurrah! Elsie's hame—Elsie's comed hame!' they shouted, so loud that even the minister and Christian heard, and stood still almost in affright. The face of Hew grew as pale as death, but just then his father came, and, taking him by the arm, led him on in front, leaving the laddies to tell Effie and the rest all about it. Briefly but perfectly Lintlaw explained the whole story to his son, and it did his heart good to see the look which superseded surprise in his eyes.

'Ye'd better gang awa' an' see Elsie a meenit by yersel', Hew,' said Lintlaw, with thoughtful consideration, 'an' I'll keep them a' speakin' oot here a while yet.'

Mechanically Hew obeyed. Dared he believe it? Could it be that Elsie was come back true to him, to leave them nevermore, some day to become the mistress of Carlowrie? He walked like one in a dream, and like one in a dream entered the house, and walked through every room till he found Elsie. She was standing in the middle of the best room, and, even in the deep shadow cast all about her by the twilight, he could see the look on her face, and his heart leaped to see it.

'Elsie! Elsie!' he said, and took a step towards her, and the next moment he held her in his arms, her fair head was pillowed on his breast; she was his for time and for eternity.

Surely that moment of supreme, unspeakable joy swept away for ever all the bitter memories of the past.

By and by there came a low yet impatient knock at the door, and the radiant face of Christian peeped in.

'It's my turn now, Hew,' she said, her voice tremulous in its great joy. 'Oh, Elsie, Elsie, I aye said ye wad come back!'

After a little they all went down to the parlour, and then what rejoicings! Mr. Laidlaw's earnest hand-clasp, Effie's tearful yet joyful kiss, and the boisterous greetings of the laddies, were like to overwhelm Elsie altogether. Seeing and feeling how dear she was to them all, she wondered much how she could ever have brought herself to think they had forgotten her. In the middle of all this deep, thankful joy, there was one regret, one yearning unfulfilled, for at the supper-table there was an empty chair. And yet all felt that the spirit of the sweet mother was hovering near them, that in heaven she was glad with and for them all.

'I think we will raise a song of thanksgivin' to our God the nicht, bairns,' said Lintlaw, when Christian handed him the book from the sideboard. Then he read slowly and falteringly the opening verse of the hundred and third Psalm :—

'O thou my soul, bless God the Lord;
And all that in me is
Be stirred up His holy name
To magnify and bless.'

Then Christian raised the tune of St. Magnus, and Mr. Laidlaw's clear tenor, and Hew's deep bass, and the laddies' shrill, hearty trebles, mingled sweetly with hers, but neither Lintlaw nor Elsie sang a note. To Elsie's home-sick heart that singing seemed like the very music of the heavenly choir. How often she had heard it in her dreams, how often longed for it in her waking hours! The face of Uncle Davie wore a far-off expression, as if his thoughts were far away from earth and earthly things. When the singing ceased, he closed the book, and said reverently, 'Let us pray.'

That prayer, the outpouring of a thankful and reverent spirit before its Maker, calmed the excited feelings of all kneeling with him, and a great deep peace settled down upon Lintlaw.

'Aunt Effie is here, Christian,' whispered Elsie when they rose.

Christian nodded, and answered softly, 'Ay, she sees an' kens a'. We hav'na lost mother, Elsie, only she is within the veil, and we are without for a little while.'

. . . . . .

A letter written and despatched to Edinburgh on the morrow brought Howard and Marjorie Traquair to Lintlaw on the afternoon of the following day.

Need I say how warmly they were welcomed, and how little pressure it required to make them spend a week beneath the roof-tree which had sheltered Elsie so long? The true, unaffected hearts of the brother and sister, who remembered still the days that had been, when proverty and obscurity had been their portion, not uplifted in any way by their changed fortunes, were thoroughly at home at Lintlaw.

It was but natural that the certainty that Elsie's love could never now be his, saddened slightly the heart of Howard Traquair. But the sight of Hew Dalrymple—one look into his handsome face, on which was written sincerity and nobleness of heart—banished selfish regret, and made him glad for Elsie. He was worthy of her; and so Howard told him, with a grip of the hand which spoke volumes.

Surely there never had been such happy days at Lintlaw, and the walls rang with young voices, with trills of sweet laughter, with merry jest and song, for Howard and Marjorie kept them all gay. But at length it came to an end. The brother and sister must go to their own home, leaving Elsie behind. Loving regrets followed them; and they took with them the promise that Christian and Elsie at least, and as many more as liked to come, should spend Christmas at Traquair; and of course Howard and Marjorie were pledged to be present at the double wedding which in the spring would take place at Lintlaw.

That night, after they were away, Hew and Elsie walked across the stubble fields in the bright harvest moonlight to see Aunt Effie's grave. The turf was green and fresh, and there were flowers in bloom still, for many loving hands tended that loved resting-place. A white marble stone, with a dove resting on the slab-base, recorded that here slept

EUPHEMIA AGNES BAILLIE,
THE BELOVED WIFE OF
DAVID DALRYMPLE OF LINTLAW;

and below were the words, inscribed in letters of gold—

'She being dead yet speaketh.'
'Her works do follow her.'

Reading these words Elsie's tears fell, but they were not tears of sorrow. For though the beloved dead might not return to them, they would go to her, and, as she herself had said in the last days, there was one family in heaven.

'Dear Aunt Effie!' whispered Elsie. 'Oh, Hew, we must live as she would have us live, and keep her memory in our hearts to the end.'

'Ay,' said Hew dreamily. 'Elsie, lookin' back on that time when I thought ye false to me—to us all,—I shudder. It was all dark. Mother taken away, you lost to us; everything seemed against me thegither. I even said there could be nae God, else such things wouldna be. I ken now, my darling, that I needed that discipline to mak' me mair mindful that this life is not all. I can thank God for it now; but oh, my Elsie, how much harder it was for you than me!'

'Never mind, Hew; it is over now, thank God,' said Elsie. 'Let us never forget how wonderfully we have been led hitherto.'

Then Elsie stooped and touched with her lips the name upon the stone. Henceforth that would be a sacred spot to them, as it was to many another heart in the parish. Hew also bent his head, and Elsie heard him say 'Mother,' just as he would have said it had she been standing with them. Then he took Elsie's hand upon his strong arm, and they went away home.

CONCLUSION.

IN the spring, when there were tender buds on hedge and tree, when green blades and tiny blossoms were peeping out everywhere, the double wedding took place at Lintlaw. The brides both wore white, and it was a question which looked best. Christian was the statelier, more handsome of the two; but Elsie, in her girlish loveliness, was if anything more admired. Howard gave her away. No brother ever acted a more noble, generous part towards a sister than he displayed towards the woman he had hoped to call wife. Sweet Marjorie was there as Elsie's bridemaiden, a capacity which Effie, of course, filled for Christian. It was a quiet wedding, as befitted it should, but there was a deep and thankful joy which is often lacking from more imposing ceremonials.

The minister and his wife went south, Hew and Elsie to a little out-of-the-world corner on the western coast, to taste of the happiness which dwelt in Eden.

There was one secret which Elsie kept from her husband till she had been many years mistress of Carlowrie,—it related to the Lady Anne's will; and Hew Dalrymple was a middle-aged man before he knew that his wife in marrying him had forfeited a great estate; and then, of course, it was too late to say anything, even if Elsie would have listened.

Within a year after the double wedding there were great rejoicings at Tyneholm, when the Laird brought home a winsome bride from the north. After that happy event the 'big house' was seldom shut up, so great was the love the young wife had for it. What wonder, seeing that she was surrounded there by so many well-beloved friends?

After his marriage, Keith 'settled down,' and was at once the most popular and the best-known landlord in the Lothians. In Traquair Howard dwelt alone, and though years went by he found no second love. Yet he was not unhappy. He was content in the fulfilling of his duties, in the affection of his people, in the love of his many, many friends. Need I say he was very often in the Lowlands, and that he had his own room beneath Marjorie's roof-tree? Mrs. Hamilton and Edith, fond of travelling as of yore, roamed about all the year round, until the elder lady's health failed, and they settled down permanently with her bachelor brother, Sir Harry Cecil, at Alnwick Hall. Both loved Keith's wife, and paid a yearly visit in the summer-time to Tyneholm.

Tyneholm, Carlowrie, Lintlaw, the Manse, dear names! hallowed by many sweet and sacred associations, there were not happier homes in all the Lothians.

In due course a little Effie came home to the Manse, who was early taught to lisp the name of 'Grandma, and to love that precious grave. Elsie's baby was a boy, and very proud she was of him too, and she hoped with all her heart he would grow up to be as good a man as his father and his grandfather before him. And when the son and heir arrived at Tyneholm, what rivalry between the young mothers! What comparisons were drawn between the babies! But of course, since each was perfectly convinced that there was not, and never could be, so lovely a child as hers, each and all were perfectly content.

These little ones, grown to manhood and womanhood, are among the best and truest Lothian folk to-day.

GLOSSARY OF SCOTCH WORDS.

A', all.
Abe, be.
Aboon (or, abune), above.
Aboot, about.
Adae, either.
Ae, one; only.
Aff, off.
Aff-pittin', putting off.
Aff-putten, cast off.
Aiblins, perhaps.
Ain, own.
Aince (or, ance), once.
Airth, earth.
Amang, among.
Ane, one.
Anent, concerning.
Anither, another.
A'thing, all things; every thing.
Auld, old.
Ava', at all.
Awa', away.

Bade, staid.
Bairn, child.
Baith, both.
Bannet, bonnet.
Bauld, bold.
Bawbee, a half-penny.
Behauden, beholden.
Ben, in.
Ben-end, parlor or sitting-room; kitchen.
Bide, stay.
Biggin, building, house.
Binna, be not; is not.
Birr, to make a whirring noise.
Bluid, blood.
Bode, same as bade, staid.
Bonnie, or bonny, beautiful.
Bonnieness, cleverness.
Bothy, hut, cottage.
Brae, a hill-slope, acclivity.
Braw, fine.
Brawly, finely; well.
Braid, broad.
Bricht, bright.
Brither, brother.
Brocht, brought.
Brunt, burned.
Buik, book.
Buirdly, stout; broad-made.
Bund, bound.
Burn (or, burnie), rivulet.
But and ben, back room and sitting-room.
Byre, cow-stable; sheep-pen.

Cairn, a mound of stones.
Canna, can not.
Canny, gentle; well-disposed.
Cauld, cold.
Ceevil, civil.
Certy, for certain, sure; indeed.
Chairge, charge.
Chap, tap; thrum.
Cheep, chirp; a word.
Chiel (or, chield,) young man.
Claes, clothes.
Claith, cloth.
Clash, talk; converse; gossip.
Clud, cloud.
Coont, count.
Coorse, course.
Crack, talk; gossip.
Cratur, creature.
Craw, crow.
Creepie, stool; hassock.
Crood, crowd.
Croon, crown.
Croose (or, crouse,) pert; bold.
Cutty, short; small in stature.

Dae, do.
Daffing, sporting.
Daft, foolish; mad.
Dauchter, daughter.
Daur, dare.
Daurna, dare not.
Dawtie, darling; one doated on.
Deave, deafen.
Dee, die.
Deed (or, deid), dead.
Denty, dainty.
Didna, did not.
Dinna, do not.
Disna, does not.
Div, do.
Dochter, daughter.
Donnert, stupid.
Doo, dove.
Dool, grief, trouble.
Doon, down.
Doot, doubt.
Douce, grave; serious.
Dour, grim.
Dowie, sad.
Dreich, slow; tedious.
Drookit, drenched; drowned.
Droon, drown.
Drucken, drunk.
Dumbfoondered, amazed.
Dune, done.
Dwine, dwindle.

Ee (or, e'e), eye.
Een (or, e'en), eyes.
Eerie, timorous; afraid.
Efter, after.
Efternune, afternoon.
Embro, Edinboro'; Edinburgh.
Eneuch (or, eneugh), enough.
Ettle, intend; aim at; attempt.
Even doon, downright.

Faither, father.
Farl, cake.
Fash, trouble; annoy.
Fashious, helpless.
Faur, far.
Faut, fault.
Fecht, fight.

Feckless, worthless; feeble.
Fecklessness, carelessness.
Fell, keen or keenly.
Fend, provide.
Ferlie, wonder (contemptuously); a fancy.
Fesh, fetch.
Fit, foot.
Flichter, flutter.
Flooer, flower.
Flure, floor.
Flyte, scold.
Foondry, foundry.
Forebear (or, forbear), ancestress; ancestor.
Forbye, besides.
Fornent, opposite.
Forrit, forward.
Foucht, fought.
Frae, from.
Freend, friend.
Frem, strange.
Fricht, fright.
Fule, fool.
Fushionless, incompetent.

GAE, go.
Gaed, went.
Gaffer, direct.
Gait, way.
Gane, gone.
Gang, go.
Gar, make.
Gawn, going.
Gear, goods; property.
Genty, elegantly formed; neat; high-bred.
Gey, very; pretty.
Geyan, very.
Gie, give.
Gien, given.
Gif (or, gin), if.
Girn, grin; snarl at.
Glaiket, thoughtless; foolish.
Glisk, glimpse.
Gloaming, twilight.
Gomeril, fool; dolt; blockhead.
Goon, gown.
Gowan, wild daisy.
Grabbit, grabbed.
Grat, cried.
Grawn, grand.
Greet, cry.
Grue, shudder; shiver.
Grund, ground.
Gude (or, guid), good.
Gump, wade.

HAE, have.
Haen, had.
Haena, have not.
Hail (or, hale), whole.
Hairst, harvest.
Hame, home.
Hantle, a handful; much; many.
Hasna, has not.
Haud, hold.
Havena, have not.
Heid, head.
Helpit, helped.
Hing, hung.
Hinna, have not.
Hizzie, young woman; tom-boy.
Hoo, how.
Hoolet, owl; owlet.
Hooly, slowly.
Hooly! take leisure; stop!
Hoose, house.
Hopit, hoped.
Houp, hope.
Howdy-hole, closet.
Howin, hoeing.
Hubble, confusion.

ILK or ilka, each; every.
Intae (and, intil), into.
Ither, other.

JIMPY, little; neat; slender.
Jist, just.

KEBBUCK, a cheese-cake.
Keek, peep; look sharply.
Keepit, kept.
Ken, know.
Kenna, know not.
Kennin', knowing.
Kent (or, kenned), known, knew.
Kep, cape.
Kintry, country.
Kirn, harvest home; harvest feast.
Kittle, ticklish; nice; intricate.
Kye, cows.

LAIRD, lord; a land-proprietor.
Lairn, learn.
Lammie, little lamb.
Lane (his, her, its, etc.), alone.
Lang, long.
Lauch, laugh.
Lave, remainder; rest.
Leddy, lady.
Leal, loyal; faithful.
Lee, lie.
Len', loan.
Leeve, live.
Licht, light.
Lichtlie, sneer at; treat with contempt.
Lichtit, lighted.
Likit, liked.
Limmer, a wanton.
Lippen, trust.
Lookit, looked.
Lug, ear.
Lum, chimney.

MA, my.
Mair, more.
Maist, most.
Maister, master.
Maitter, matter.
Mane, fuss; ado.
Maun, must.
Maunna, must not.
Micht, might.
Midden-dyke, garden wall; ditch.
Mirk, dark.
Mither, mother.
Mony, many.
Moosie, mouse.
Mou', mouth.
Muckle, much.
Muirland, moor.
Mune-licht, moon-light.

NA (or, nae), no, not.
Nae, none.
Naebody, nobody.
Naething, nothing.
Neebor, neighbor.
Needna, need not.
Neist, next.
Nicht, night.
Noo, now: at the noo, at present; at once.

OCHT, aught.
Ongauns, goings on; doings.
Ony, any.
Oo, yes.
'Ooman, woman.
Oor, our.
Oot (or, ooten), out; out of.
Oucht, ought.
Ower, over.
Oxter, arm-pit.

PAIDL'T, paddled.

Pat, pot.
Patrick (or, paitrick), partridge.
Peety, pity.
Pit, put.
Pleeshure, pleasure.
Pooer, power.
Poo'rless, powerless.
Prig, cheapen; dispute.
Prood, proud.
Puir, poor.
Putten, put.

Quate, quiet.
Quean, servant-maid; young woman.

Rael, real.
Reek, smoke.
Reem, run over.
Richt, right.
Rin, run.
Roond, round.
Roup, sale.
Rowan, the mountain ash.
Rowth, plenty.

Sae, so.
Sair, sore; very,
Saut, salt.
Scone, cake.
Scoor, scour.
Shoon, shoes.
Sic (or, siccan), such.
Sicht, sight.
Siller, silver.
Simmer, summer.
Sin, since; after.
Sinsyne, afterward.
Skelly, squint.
Skep, hive for bees.
Slippit, slipped.
Smeddum, spirit; mettle.
Snell, biting; severe; sharp.
Socht, sought.
Sodger, soldier.
Spate, flood.
Speer (or, spier), ask for; inquire.
Speerit, spirit.
Stanes, stones.
Steer, stare.
Stoop, a prop; a post fixed in the earth.
Stoory, dusty; stormy.
Stoppit, stopped.
Stour, dust.
Stracht (or, strecht), straight.
Stravage, wander or stray.
Stude (or, studer), stood.
Sune, soon.
Sutten, set.
Syne, after; ago.

Tae, to.
Tapsalteerie, topsy-turvy.
Tatties, potatoes.
Telt, told.
Tempit, tempted.
Thack, thatch.
Thae, those.
Thegither, together.
Thocht, thought.
Thole, bear; endure.
Thon, those.
Thowless, slack; lazy; heedless.
Thrapple, throat; windpipe.
Thraw (or, throw), twist; quarrel; be cross.
Thrawn, cross; perverse; quarrelsome.
Thrawnness, perversity.
Thraid, thread.
Till, to.
Toon, town.
Twa, two.
Twal', twelve.

Unkent, unknown.
Unco, very, strange.
Unneeborly; unneighborly.
Uphaud, uphold.

Verra, very.

Wad (or, wud), would.
Waddin', wedding.
Wae, sorrowful; sad.
Waggit, wagged.
Wantit, wanted.
Wark, work.
Warld, world.
Warst, worst.
Warstle, struggle.
Waur, worse.
Weans, babes; children.
Wechty, weighty.
Wee, little.
Weel, well.
Whae, who.
Whan, when.
Whatten, what; which one.
Whaur, where.
Wheen, a number; a good deal.
Wheesht, be calm, hush.
Whiles (or, whyles), sometimes.
Whing, cry; complain; fret.
Winna, will not.
Withhaud, withhold.
Workit, worked.
Wrang, wrong.
Wudna, would not.
Wull, will.
Wullint, willing.
Wunner, wonder.
Wush, wish.

Yammer (or, yammer), fret; scold.
Yestreen, yester evening.
Yett, gate.
Yirls, earls.
Yont, beyond.

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